MEET 'EM WITH SHORTY McCABE

SEWELL FORD

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MEET 'EM WITH SHORTY McCABE

By SEWELL FORD

TORCHY

TRYING OUT TORCHY

ON WITH TORCHY

TORCHY PRIVATE, SEC.

WILT THOU TORCHY

THE HOUSE OF TORCHY

TORCHY AND VEE

TORCHY AS A PA

SHORTY McCABE'S ODD NUMBERS

SHORTY McCABE ON THE JOB

SHORTY McCABE GETS THE HAIL

SHORTY McCABE LOOKS 'EM OVER

MEET 'EM WITH SHORTY McCABE

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BY

SEWELL FORD

NEW YORK

EDWARD J. CLODE

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M.T.G. Ja. 28-21.

MEET 'EM WITH SHORTY McCABE

I

SHORTY ON AN UPLIFT DEAL

HAVING a friend like Pinckney has its drawbacks, after all. Not that I'm knocking him, understand. And I expect most folks would be more or less chesty about having him on their list, even as a noddin' acquaintance, unless it was some of these parlor Bolsheviks who go around grouchin' about the idle rich. And speaking of that class, while you might find some that are richer, I don't know where you'd dig up a specimen that was idler than Lionel Pinckney Ogden Bruce.

But I must say he does it well. You know so many of these young plutes who've been brought up on a six-figure income seem to get so bored with themselves and everybody else that you almost feel sorry for 'em. You see 'em yawnin' in the club windows, mopin' around at their country places, or rollin' by in their limousines lookin' peeved and moody, and you wonder why they ain't happier.

But Pinckney ain't that kind. He don't drag

around tryin' to find some new way of killin' time. Not him. His program of events is always full up; yet what it's all about he couldn't tell you if he tried, which he wouldn't. Anyway, work has no place on it. Absolutely. I taxed him with it once.

"Honest now, Pinckney," says I, "can you remember ever havin' done anything useful in your life?"

"Let's see," says he, rubbin' his chin with the crook end of his walking stick thoughtful. "Wouldn't you count being best man at some twenty odd weddings?"

"Ruled out," say I. "You may think that's your steady job, but it ain't; it's just a habit. One more guess."

"Well," says he, "I don't know that I can recall —Oh, I say though! Surely I can. Didn't I invent a new cocktail once? Why the fellows still talk about——"

"Disqualified," says I. "Besides, you'd better forget that you ever had criminal instincts like that. In a year or two more a confession of that sort would send you to jail."

"You mean," says Pinckney, " that cocktail mixing will be regarded as compounding a felony? Oh, I say, Shorty, but that's rather good, you know."

"You're welcome to the serial rights," says I.

And it's always more or less like that when Pinckney strays into the Physical Culture Studio here—just one bright little thing after another. As far as that goes it's cheerin' and chirky. But the next thing you know he's let you in for some fool

stunt or other that may turn out all right or may not.

For he's a born kidder, Pinckney. Life ain't no vale of weeps for him. It's a joke, and he's bound to have it so, no matter what happens. Even when his wife's aunt Julia appears unexpected from Northfield, Mass., and camps down for a two weeks' visit. From all I've heard about her, too, that's some acid test. Mrs. Bruce admits it herself.

Seems Aunt Julia is about as popular with her relations as an ex-grand duke would be at an Emma Goldman testimonial meeting. She's the fam'ly regulator, Aunt Julia is; a volunteer committee of one who has been runnin' a mail order advice factory for years, tellin' her folks what they ought to do and what they oughtn't, 'specially the last. And I gather that gettin' a letter from Aunt Julia is about as pleasin' an experience as wakin' up on the sleepin' porch after a cold rain has been drivin' in on you for half an hour or so.

So you can guess why she's the only one of her fam'ly left in Northfield. Lives in a fine old house up there, I understand, and hardly ever leaves the place except for her annual trip to Boston, where she takes in the Spring flower show and lays in a stock of seeds and bulbs for her garden. But she's an active old dame. From her house on top of one of them big hills she has her sharp eyes on most of the world, not forgettin' the heathen in foreign lands.

Next to regulatin' her fam'ly and growin' prize chrysanthemums that's her big side line—reformin'

the heathen. Being such a free contributor to the missionary fund she has her say as to just how the reformin' shall be done, too. So even in far-off China and on India's coral strand she manages to mix in. What chance then does Pinckney stand of escapin', livin' only a couple of hundred miles from her? This was the first time, though, that she'd ever come in person. He was tellin' me about it the other day.

Seems there was another nephew of hers in New York, a sporty young hick that she'd tried to make a missionary of and failed. When she'd cut his allowance down to one-third he'd come here and got a job as salesman for an automobile firm. Also when she'd write askin' him how he spent his evenings and what sort of friends he was making and so on he'd wire back some tommyrot like: "Sorry, Auntie, dear, but the dealers are all out of your favorite brand of cigarettes. Why don't you try rolling your own?" So she'd come down to do a little sleuthing for herself, incidentally favorin' the Bruces with a visit.

"Charming old girl," says Pinckney. "So perfectly frank about pointing out one's faults. I am making a list of mine, going to have it framed when it's finished and send it to her for a Christmas present. Perhaps you would like a copy, too, Shorty?"

"Gwan!" says I, "you don't deserve a nice old aunt like that."

"That's the worst of it, Shorty!" says he. "I do not. And I enjoy having her here so much. Makes me feel selfish. I'll tell you what, though; suppose

I bring her around and share her with you some afternoon? Eh?"

Course, I only grins unsuspicious and pays no more attention to it than I do to most of his josh. But I say, you never know what fool thing Pinckney will think of next. Here only the other day as I comes strollin' back from lunch I finds a taxicab waitin' in front of the studio, with him and this high-chested old girl in the purple lid waitin' inside.

She don't look so fierce, I'll admit, only her chin might remind you some of Pershing's and them shrewd eyes of hers are the kind that never wavers or flinches from anything. My guess is that she'd make a good lion tamer if she hadn't wasted all her early years trainin' her fam'ly. Outside of that she's just a rather classy looking old dame with white hair and fresh-colored cheeks.

"Oh, I say, Shorty," hails Pinckney, "where does one go to find the homes of the lower classes?"

"Eh?" says I, starin' puzzled.

"The haunts of the undeserving poor?" goes on Pinckney. "Auntie wants to see them. I've driven her down Sixth Avenue as far as Fourteenth Street, but she doesn't seem satisfied. She wishes to see——"

"Your wretched slums," breaks in Auntie, "not your third-rate shopping district. Where are the homes of your miserable poor?"

"Oh!" says I. "You want to go down and cross Canal until you come to such streets as Henry and Rivington and——"

"There!" says Pinckney. "I was sure Professor

McCabe could tell us just where to go, Auntie. But the only safe way is to take him along. Eh? What say?"

"He could hardly be such a poor guide as you are, Pinckney," says Aunt Julia, "so let him come."

"You see?" says Pinckney, noddin' to me. "You have been chosen."

"Thanks," says I, "but you'd better count me out this time. I might not qualify, after all."

"Nonsense, young man!" says Aunt Julia, pushin' open the taxi door impulsive. "Get in and tell the driver where to go."

And somehow when she tells you to do a thing you do it. Anyway, before I could frame any argument as to why I couldn't go I was on my way. Inside of half an hour, too, I was showin' Aunt Julia the real thing in slums. You know what some of them streets on the lower East Side are like—swarmin' with kids and push carts, babies playin' in the gutter, more babies clutterin' the doorsteps and leanin' from fire escapes, half-naked and dirty. The regulation thing.

Seems it's all new to Auntie, though. She works up a fresh shudder at every block. "Such sordid misery!" says she. "Such utter wretchedness! Tell me, what is being done to alleviate all this? What are you doing?"

"Shorty, what are we doing?" demands Pinckney, with that cut-up twinkle in his eye.

"Why," says I, "I expect we're stayin' away from it as much as we can."

"And do you mean to tell me," comes back

Auntie, "that you feel no sense of responsibility for such dirt and poverty and crime?"

I shrugs my shoulders. "You see ma'am," says I, "I didn't invent the East Side. It was here when I was born."

"There you are, Auntie!" says Pinckney. "The perfect alibi. Interesting thing, though, poverty. I understand books have been written about it. Some day I mean to look one up. Really."

"Bah!" says Auntie. "You have a frivolous nature. You are callous to the cries of suffering humanity. And you ought to feel ashamed, both of you."

"So I would, too, if I'd known about it before," says Pinckney. "But, you see, Auntie, I am just discovering it. With Professor McCabe, however, it's quite different. He's known about it all along, yet he goes on in his careless frivolous way, without shedding a tear. Shorty, perhaps you can look us in the eye and tell us why you haven't put a stop to all this long ago?"

I gives him the grin. "Maybe I figured it was too husky a job for me to tackle," says I. "Besides, I don't just see how it's up to me, anyway."

Auntie sniffs disapprovin'. "The age old excuse," says she. "'Am I then, my brother's keeper?' Come, let us go. I shall bring this up at the next conference."

As for me, I was willin'. I didn't feel that Auntie had quite made out a case against me, but I didn't breathe real easy until they'd dropped me off at the Studio and I was safe upstairs with the door shut.

And if Pinckney wanted to share Auntie again with anybody I hoped he'd pick on someone else.

You'd thought he'd been satisfied with that, too. But it seems he had such a good time watchin' me squirm under Aunt Julia's glare that he had to dope out an encore. So here Sunday afternoon, as I'm putterin' peaceful about the grounds out at Rockhurst-on-the-Sound, who should show up but this same pair. It seems that in drivin' through the village Auntie had discovered that we had the makings of a slum district, right at our elbows; that is, she'd seen our Dago settlement, down near the Nut & Bolt works, and I expect Pinckney had egged her on to tackle me again.

"Surely, young man," says she, "here are conditions of wretchedness which you might be doing something to alter."

"Oh, I don't know," says I. "Them Italians ain't so bad off. They get along pretty fair."

"Then you know very little about them," says she. "Why, even with a passing glance I can tell what dull gray lives they must lead in those shabby, dirty tenements. Think of the hopeless, sodden monotony of their poverty-ridden existence. And you stand by, seeing it every day, without even lifting a finger to help."

"Not a finger!" says Pinckney solemn. "I'm surprised at you, Shorty."

"Well, for one thing," says I, "I don't know as I could tell just how to make a start. If I did, maybe I'd give it a try."

"Why," says Auntie, "that is simple enough.

You begin with one family group. You get to know them, gain their confidence, find out what is wrong with their wretched scheme of life, and help them to change it. That is the method. For example, I noticed a cobbler's shop, with living rooms behind. There were numerous children about——"

"Joe Sabretto's?" I asks.

"It was some such name as that painted on the window, I think," says Auntie. "Now why could you not begin with him?"

"Eh?" says I, and I expect the way I was gawpin' at her I must have looked more stupid than usual. "With—with Joe Sabretto?"

"Certainly," she snaps out crisp. "Why not with one as well as another?"

Having patience with people who stare at her with their mouths open ain't one of Aunt Judia's long suits I take it. And the look she gives me should have shriveled me up. I don't know as I could say exactly what she raps out next, for I'm too busy smotherin' a chuckle, but the idea of it all is that if I'm too simple in the head to crash in with a little uplift work on my own hook she supposes she'll have to go along and show me how it's done. That is, if I'm really in earnest and want to learn.

"Sure thing!" says I. "Suppose we go right down now, eh?"

And say, if I'd thought a year I couldn't have sketched out anything that would have suited me much better. You see, I happen to know quite a lot about Joe Sabretto. No need goin' into details, but he's a cousin of Dominick's, who's been doing my

outside work for five or six years; in fact, it was Joe who found Dominick for me. Also Joe has been patchin' up the McCabe family shoes ever since he's been in business, he's been in on a few political campaigns that I've had a hand in, and—Well, we ain't exactly strangers. So if I was goin' to be shown how to give the scientific shunt to wretchedness and poverty acordin' to the latest Northfield methods I didn't mind startin' with Joe. I knew he'd forgive me if my foot slipped or anything.

I can't deny that his establishment is kind of a messy place. It's the middle store on the ground floor of an old wooden block with tenements in the back and on the three upper floors. Joe's idea of an artistic window display is to plant his greasy old stitchin' machine as near the front as he can get it and then pile his unfinished repair work around it. Yes, there usually is a sickly geranium plant that one of the girls has brought home from school and any vivid show posters that Joe can get hold of.

Half way back a red and yellow cotton print strung on wires curtains off the shop from the place where the younger kids are stowed away at night in bunks. Behind that is another bedroom, and then in the rear, openin' on a cluttered backyard, is the combined kitchen and dinin' room. It's all handy and convenient. Joe can sit out front at his bench and chat away with Mrs. Sabretto in the kitchen. He's never late for meals, and all he has to do to guess what he's going to get is to take a sniff. So the fried onions or the cabbage soup never surprise him. And he ain't likely to miss any of the cute

sayings of the kids, either. Generally he has two or three sprawlin' around at his feet while he's at work. Might bother some folks, but not an Italian. They sure are strong for the youngsters; and the more they have around, and the dirtier they are, the fonder they seem to be of 'em. Anyway, that's the way I've found Joe.

And this being Sunday when we breezes in on him, Aunt Julia and me, course he has nothing else to do but indulge his weakness. As we rolls up in the car Joe is discovered sitting just outside the shop door with the newest baby in his lap, a two-year-old, balanced on one knee, and a couple more children draped around him somehow. The oldest can't be over six, and they all seem to be cut from one pattern—with black curly hair, bright brown eyes, and stout, chubby legs. Joe is smoking his pipe, he has arrayed himself in a pink and green shirt with a wall-paper pattern, and he seems calm and contented.

Course, the minute he spots me he shows a double row of white teeth and starts to give me the friendly hail, but I blocks him off the best I can.

"Is this Joe Sabretto, the shoemaker?" says I.

"Sure t'ing," says he, still grinnin'.

"Then listen," says I. "Here is a kind, good lady who has come to help you in your troubles."

"Wottell?" says Joe, starin' from one to the other of us.

"What does he say?" asks Auntie.

"That was Dago for 'Much obliged,' I guess," says I. "Now I expect I'd better explain that——"

"No," says Aunt Julia. "I will talk to him. My good man, how many children have you?"

"Me?" says Joe. "If you count leetle Guiseppe, w'at taka da sleep here, and big Rosie, who goes with her gran'-moter, I got seex. Da scarlet feve, he get one, an' da pneumon' one more."

"Six living!" says Auntie. "Altogether too many for a young man of your years and in such circumstances. Too many by far. You cannot provide adequately for six, I am sure. I presume that most of the time they go hungry?"

"Yes, all time hoongry," admits Joe, stoopin' to pat one of the youngsters on his fat tummy. "See? Eat lak leetle peegs."

"No wonder you are obliged to live in such wretched quarters as this, then," says Auntie, sniffing in at the front door. "I suppose they are fearfully unhygienic. I must inspect them. Come, my man, show me through."

Joe looks at me inquirin', for it aint strictly polite to brush past that red and yellow curtain unless you're invited. I tips him the wink, though, and after untanglin' himself from three of the kids, he proceeds to lead the way. Auntie takes one look at the sleepin' bunks, gasps with horror, and hurries on. In the kitchen we finds Mrs. Sabretto, who's rather a stunnin' looker when she's dressed up, busy around the stove, where she appears to have all kinds of stuff cookin'. She don't look any too pleased, either, at havin' visitors towed in.

"Humph!" says Aunt Julia, chokin' as she gets a lungful of garlic perfume. "What vile smelling

food! How you can avoid ptomaine poisoning I can't conceive. But what is the meaning of all this? Do you run a boarding house, my good woman?"

She's pointing to the backyard, where the dining table, stretched to it's full length, is set with eighteen or twenty places. Mrs. Sabretto don't answer. She just gives her a flash from them brown eyes of hers. So I nudges Joe.

"A leetle party," explains Joe. "My brudder Guiseppe get turn loose from de army las' mont' an' now he's get engage, with a nica girl. Some frien's come tonight. We have beeg dinner. Sing song after. Fina time."

"What reckless improvidence!" says Auntie. "Here you are, poor as you can be, and yet you are ready to spend your last penny in silly entertaining. And perhaps next week your landlord will be putting you out on the street for not paying your rent."

"How about that, Joe?" says I. "What you gonna tell the landlord?"

"Tell him chase himself, eh?" chuckles Joe. "But I t'ink he no bodder me."

"What can the man mean?" demands Aunt Julia.

" 'Fess up, Joe," says I. "You own this whole block, don't you?"

Joe nods, grinnin'. "You know, Meest McCabe, You lenda me da mon w'en I make buy on da morge. I show you da pape w'en I pay heem off, too. An' now I got all da rent comin' in every mont'. Yes?"

"Correct," says I. "But you lead a dull, gray life, don't you, Joe; full of soggy anatomy and—and all that sort of stuff?"

"Wottell?" says Joe, droppin' back into his musical native tongue.

"I mean you're having a poor time of it," I explains, "with all these kids saddled on you, and no tiled shower bath in your bedroom, and a lot of unrefined people livin' all around you. Why, I expect not a single member of your family reads the Atlantic Monthly reg'lar, or has ever been Who's-Who-verized? That's what we're here for, Joe, to have you sketch out all the pathetic points of your wretched existence so we can tell you just how to live a better, happier life. Now let's have the worst of it."

Joe stares at me blank and scratches his head. "You maka da fun, eh, Profess?" he asks.

"Does that listen like joke stuff?" says I. "Go on, Joe, tell the kind lady what troubles you most. Is it not knowin' how many calories you sop up with a plate of macaroni, or is it havin' so many children to bother with?"

He seems to get that last. "Oh!" says he. "Da kids! Fine, eh? Rosie, she go by da High-up School nex' year. She learna lot t'ings—reada da story pape, playa da pian', dance da shimmy. Little Salvatore, he smart, too——printa da 'No Trust' sign for shop, shoota da craps, driva da flivv lak Billydam. An' da bambino all time mak' us laugh."

"Well, maybe so," says I. "Shows your crude taste. But what about all these low-brow neighbors of yours? Don't they get on your nerves?"

"You mean da peop in da block?" says Joe.

"Nice peop. Yes. Most of 'em good frien's—Genoese, lak us. Maka plenty mon, paya da rent every Sat'day night. One is uncle to me; plenty cousins, too. Somebody seek, he has lotta frien's. Somebody losa da job, no get hoongry. Somebody have birthday, or name bambino, or get married, then we have big party. You come tonight, you see."

I turns to Aunt Julia and shrugs my shoulders. "Sorry," says I, "but it looks like you'd picked out a hopeless case. Joe insists on being disgustingly happy in spite of his wretched condition. What's to be done about it?"

And for once in her life Aunt Julia is stumped. "I—I don't believe I know," says she.

Just about then, though, Mrs. Sabretto starts in unloadin' a few remarks that she seems to have been storin' up. They're in Italian, but they listen sort of peppy and interestin'.

"What does she say, Joe?" I asks curious.

Joe, he kind of tints up and shakes his head.

"Perhaps," puts in Aunt Julia, "the woman has a different viewpoint. I should like to hear what it is?"

"Come on, Joe, give it to us,"I urges.

"She lak to know," says Joe, "if kinda lady have beeg fam'ly, too?"

"Why," says Aunt Julia, "tell her that I have a son and a daughter, both grown up."

Joe has another brief dialogue with the wife. "She say," goes on Joe, "do they lak you mooch, an' do you lak them?"

Say, at that I has to turn my head to hide the

grin. For Mrs. Sabretto has sure put her finger on the weak spot. Course, I'd heard from Pinckney all about how Aunt Julia's Robert had disgraced the family by marryin' a quick-lunch waitress durin' his junior year and had never been forgiven. Also how daughter Mildred had disagreed with Mother about the cigarette habit she'd accumulated at art school and had cut loose from home when she was twenty to settle down permanent in Greenwich Village and draw zippy pictures for magazine covers. No, you couldn't exactly say that Aunt Julia was popular with her immediate fam'ly. Nor you couldn't explain why to such crude folks as the Sabrettos. Anyway, Aunt Julia wasn't trying.

"I fail to see," says she frosty, "why my affairs have anything to do with the case. I regard the woman's question as highly impertinent."

"And I shouldn't wonder," says I, "but what Mrs. Sabretto feels about the same. So suppose we call it a day?"

Which we did. It wasn't a chatty ride we had back. Aunt Julia seems to have gone stale or something on the social uplift proposition, and she hasn't a word more to offer. But you might know Pinckney would make some careless break or other when we got back.

"Well," says he, beamin' cheerful, "did you two find some gloom sodden ones and administer a dose of sunshine?"

"Nope," says I. "They seemed to be particular about the brand."

And Pinckney had the poor taste to snicker.

II

SHORTY AND THE FISHHOUND

WE'D just picked up the Nick Royces at the station and had dropped 'em at their cute little stucco bungalow on the Post Road—the one with the copper green shutters and all the window boxes. They're our newly-wed neighbors, you know, who are startin' their career of married bliss with eight-cylinder tastes and a flivver income. Up to date they haven't even acquired a flivver, so whenever we get the chance we decoy 'em in with us for a ride.

You would if you knew Nick Royce—or Phyllis. They're that kind. Don't make 'em any nicer. Nick, he's one of these big, blue-eyed, pink-cheeked young husks with a smile like sunny days. And Phyllis—well, she always reminds me of a long-stemmed English violet, just picked, with the dew still on. You know? Some couple, I'll say.

So I don't quite get what Mrs. McCabe is drivin' at when she lets loose a sigh, after we've rolled on, and remarks mournful: "Isn't it a shame, Shorty?"

"Eh?" says I, makin' the turn into the shore road, and then glancin' at her puzzled.

"The way he treats Phyllis," she goes on.

"You mean not buyin' her a chummy roadster and lettin' her struggle along with only one maid?" says I.

"Stupid!" says Sadie. "Of course not. I don't suppose he told you what he was going to do next?"

"I don't remember his makin' any awful threat," says I. "What is it?"

"He's going to take her on another fishing trip," says Sadie.

I expect I chuckled some at that. The female mind can take some curious quirks, can't it? "Oh, well," says I, "that's Nick's failin', you know, this fishin' bug of his."

"I only wish I had known of it in time," says Sadie, settin' her chin firm.

You see, she'd had a good deal to do, first and last, with makin' the match. Not that it needed much engineerin', once Nick got a good look at Phyllis, but the preliminaries was Sadie's. It was a case of Phyllis visiting at the Purdy-Pells and this young Mr. Royce being dragged out to fill in at one of Mrs. Boomer Day's week-end affairs. Course, Sadie knew that Phyllis was as good as engaged to a man back in her home town, down in Virginia. But Sadie'd heard how he was nearly ten years older than Phyllis and had a bald spot, and ran a general store in some dinky country town. So she decided, sight unseen, that he wouldn't do at all. Likewise she picks on Nick Royce as a good substitute.

Her next move is to have Phyllis and Nick meet at a couple of dances, and before she knew the affair

had started it was well under way. Then I'm detailed to size up Nick and see if he's as good as he looks. I reports favorable. He comes from Rutland, Vermont; his mother's a widow who is fairly well fixed, havin' been left a half interest in a marble quarry; Nick has been out of college three years, havin' put in six or eight months with the Yankee Division, and now he has a job in Boomer Day's office. I didn't quite get the details of just what part of the bond business Nick was strugglin' with, but I gathers that he's doing well at it.

Still, them Virginia folks of Phyllis's sure raised some grand ructions when she went back and told 'em how she meant to give Baldy the sudden shunt in favor of an unknown who most likely had the pie-breakfastin' habit and was kind of vague as to who his great-grandfather was. And it wasn't until I'd had Nick dig up the fact that two of his ancestors helped old Ethan Allen spring that Ticonderoga surprise party, and that one of his great uncles had been a candidate for governor on the Democratic ticket, that they was calmed down.

We didn't mention that the great uncle was snowed under at the election, or that one of the Ticonderoga heroes survived to become a tin-peddler and broke his neck fallin' out of his cart because he'd hoisted in too much hard cider. What was the use? When we produced a picture post card of a soldiers' monument with the names of Ephraim and Joshua Royce showin' plain under the date 1776, we had them Virginia objectors eatin' out of our hand.

So they'd been married and was now supposed to

be livin' happy ever after. I couldn't see but what they was, too. But Sadie thinks different. This fishin' nonsense had gone about far enough. Phyllis couldn't stand it. Anyone could see that. She was too frail and delicate for such rough jaunts into the wilds. It had been bad enough when Nick had taken her off on their honeymoon trip up into the woods of Maine; where they knocked around for three weeks in fishing camps, canoeing up rivers with awful-sounding names, being barked at by wild moose, associating with whiskered guides who subsisted mainly on eating tobacco and who gave them flap-jacks every morning for breakfast. Phyllis, who had been brought up in a drawing room and on the front veranda, and who considered tatting an out-door sport!

"The wonder is," says Sadie, "that she stood it as well as she did. And now that Nick has a vacation he's planning to take her off on another wild trip like that. Shorty, you'll just have to talk to him, that's all."

"Eh?" says I. "Me crash in and point out chatty what a brute he is? No, thanks. I can think of enough ways of being unpopular without tryin' that."

"But I haven't said that Nick means to be cruel or brutal," says Sadie. "Of course he doesn't. He's just thoughtless. Being so big and strong himself he doesn't realize what he's asking Phyllis to go through on these excursions. If someone would only suggest this to him no doubt he would see the

point at once. And who has a better right than we have, Shorty? In fact, it's really our duty."

"Say, anybody'd think, to hear you go on," says I, "that we'd adopted that pair and was bringin' 'em up by hand. No, I won't promise a thing, but maybe I'll run down after dinner and let Nick give me the straight dope on his plans. I may give him a hunch and I may not."

There's no mistake about his being a reg'lar fish-hound, all right. You wouldn't suspect it to look at him, either, for he's kind of a finicky dresser as a rule and seldom indulges in sporty talk. But you never can tell. I expect Nick was born with it in him. They hadn't been livin' out here a fortnight before he begun askin' me where the nearest trout streams was, if there wasn't black bass in that pond over back of the country club, and if I'd ever tried for flounders off my sea-wall.

Course I couldn't give him any information. Fishin' ain't in my line, never has been. Not that I ain't tried, off and on. That's something you can't very well escape. Why, even these Harlemites, born and bred in a five-room flat, and who think they're getting close to Nature when they sit in the bleachers to see a ball game, they get run in on the fishin' game. You'll see 'em by the hundreds Sunday mornin's boardin' these fishin' steamers for a trip out to the Banks, or up at Pelham Bay paddlin' out in skiffs after eels or what not. And once they get the habit that's mostly what they live for.

But it never got to be chronic with me. Maybe because I've had such poor luck. I've been out, too,

with reg'lar guys, who knew all the different kinds of fish by their first names, could tell you their habits and tastes and whims; whether they laid their eggs in nests, or hatched 'em out in incubators, and so on. I've splashed through trout brooks with these experts and come home with nothing but wet feet and a collection of mosquito bites. I've sat out in a boat on a lake all day, and fished for bass right where they told me I couldn't help catchin' 'em. And I've never failed to jinx any excursion of the kind I ever went on. Maybe the fish don't like my face, or my breath ain't perfumed right. Anyway, the minute I drop a hook overboard they go right from there and don't come back until next day, if ever.

What I never could quite figure out, either, is the sense of this fool idea that you got to get up before daylight if you want to catch fish. Who unloaded that notion first? And what's it based on? They try to tell me that fish are hungriest when they first wake up. How do they know fish sleep at night, same as we do? Who's watched 'em at it? But suppose it's a fact. Don't they eat but once a day? And if they do, why not arrive about lunch time; or even as late as their dinner hour? If I knew as much about fish habits as some of these birds let on to I wouldn't waste all that time between meals, when likely as not the fish are loafin' around laughin' at 'em, or maybe playin' blind-man's-buff, or holdin' peace conventions, or indulgin' in their favorite water sports.

Whenever I've put any of these puzzles up to Nick

he's just laughed and shook his head. No, he didn't claim to know all about fish. Oh, he'd picked up a little here and there. About the only thing he was dead sure of was that he liked to fish. Never seemed to worry him much whether he got any or not. Just so long as he had a day when he could roll out about 4 A. M., hike off a few miles to where there was some sort of water, and fool around with his rod and reel until near dark, he was satisfied. Sounds foolish enough to me, but I can't see no great harm in it. If you can do that sort of thing and like it, then I expect it's a form of sport.

But when you go so far as to inflict it on the rest of the fam'ly, 'specially a little wife that's never worn anything but high-heeled slippers and has always been careful of her complexion—well, that's something else again. Maybe I should drop a hint to Nick.

I finds him unwrappin' a lot of packages and boxes and spreadin' what's in 'em on the livin' room table. And I never knew before what a complicated outfit you could collect just to go after a few fish. First off, there was a set of jointed rods; three of 'em, new and shiny and slick lookin'; with reels to go with 'em.

"Well, well!" says I. "Looks like you meant business, this time. Goin' to hold one in each hand and another between your teeth, eh?"

Nick explains that one is for fly castin', another for still fishin', and the third for trollin'. But say, when I glances at the price tags on some of 'em I has to gasp. Take it from me, they don't give those

things away. Why, one cost as much as I pay for a new automobile casing.

Then there was other tackle; silk lines of different sizes, and more kinds of bait than I ever knew existed; weird lookin' things made out of red flannel and feathers; nickel plated spinners and spoons, with little hooks all over 'em; artificial minnows, painted up natural as life and then some pickled minnows in glass jars; rubber water bugs, and I don't know what else.

"You sure mean to feed 'em fancy," says I. "Must have near $25 worth of bait here."

"I suppose so," admits Nick. "One must have the right kind, though, and they tell me all these things have about doubled in price recently."

"The high cost of fishin', eh?" says I.

"Behold," says Phyllis, pretendin' to pout, "my new evening dress!" And she points to the collection.

"But just think of the four-pound bass we're going to land," says Nick.

"Suppose you don't get any, after all?" says I.

"Oh, I'll get 'em," says he, waggin' his head confident.

"How about you?" I asked Phyllis. "You goin' after 'em, too?"

"No," says Phyllis. "I shall try to keep the canoe from upsetting, or stay in the camp and rest. Nick does all the fishing, you know."

She don't say it complainin', you understand, but gazes admirin' at Nick all the while. And he never seems to get the idea at all that there's anything

selfish about the proposition. So I gives him another jab.

"On your way back," says I, "I expect you'll be taking a run down into Virginia to let Phyllis see the folks?"

"Not this year," says Nick. "Can't afford it."

And how you going to get at an ego that's so covered with fish scales? I give it up. If Phyllis didn't have spunk enough to stand up for her rights, then she'd have to worry along the best way she could. Still, I was kind of sorry for her.

Then I meets this old friend of mine, Brick Hartley, who is the ex-boss of the county and a party who's wise in the head on a lot of subjects. Somehow he mentions this young Mr. Royce, saying what a fine chap he seems to be, and I tells him about this secret fishin' vice of his and what a raw deal the little wife is gettin' out of it.

"Huh!" grunts Brick. "Thinks he's a fisherman, does he? Like to cure him of that, would you?"

"Can't be done," says I. "That's the worst of the disease."

"Can't, eh?" says Brick. "Then I guess we'll have to run him up against old Doc. Denicker."

With that he proceeds to sketch out the plot of the piece. I'd seen this Doc. Denicker person driftin' around the village on and off, but about all I knew of him was that he couldn't be classed as one of the ornamental citizens of Rockhurst-on-the-Sound. He's a greasy, whiskered, heavy-paunched old pirate, with a couple of bad eyes peerin' out from under the bushiest eyebrows you ever saw. Seems

he'd drifted down from somewhere up in Connecticut years ago and had worked up kind of a reputation among the mill-hands as an herb doctor. He lived in a little shack four or five miles out and every Fall he used to go around takin' orders for what he called his Juniper Bark Stomach Bitters.

Accordin' to Brick, the stuff he sold was chiefly poor whiskey, flavored up with various roots and things, and finally the Sheriff caught him at it and had him sent up for six months. Since then he'd operated very cautious, if he hadn't quit altogether, and had given out that he was fishin' for a livin'.

"Now there's a pond up back there," says Brick, "that's just full of pickerel and other fish. Nobody knew it until Doc. Denicker begun bringin' 'em out and peddlin' 'em 'round. People have fished holes in that pond and never caught a thing. But Denicker can bring out a dozen pickerel any time he likes. Somehow, he has the knack. When is your friend Royce plannin' to start on this expedition of his?"

"In about ten days," says I.

"Then there's time for him to meet Doc. Denicker first," says Brick. "After that he may feel different about going so far to try his luck."

Well, we framed it up. Brick Hartley agreed to have Denicker on the job the followin' Sunday, and all I had to do was to pass the word confidential to Nick about how I'd heard of this pond that was just seethin' with big pickerel achin' to be caught. Course, Nick fell for it.

"By George!" says he. "That will give me a

chance to try out some of my new tackle. How would you like to go along, Shorty?"

"Well, if you'll show me how it's done," says I, "maybe I will."

Yes, we went. Nick was bustin' with enthusiasm. Just the right kind of a day for pickerel fishin', he declares, it being cloudy and still. And he's invested $5 in a dozen frog legs, besides buyin' some more kinds of spinners and things. Also, when we gets to the pond, he allows that them patches of lily pads and eel grass must be just thick with pickerel.

I must say, too, that he goes at it scientific. The way he could throw that bait out and skitter it along on the top was worth watchin'. You'd think if there was fish there they'd just naturally climb out and grab hold. Somehow, though, they didn't. For two hours or more he thrashes around on the edge of the lily pads, first in one place and then in another, without gettin' so much as a nibble. It begun to drizzle, too, which, Nick says, is exactly the kind of weather for pickerel fishin'. Still he has no luck. As for me, I'd quit after the first half hour and was rowin' the boat around and tryin' to keep dry.

"Ain't that another party down in that cove?" says I.

"You're right," says Nick. "And I believe he's —Oh, I say! Did you see the whopper he pulled in then?"

"Why," says I, "that must be old Doc. Denicker. Suppose we edge down that way."

Which we did. We edged nearer and nearer,

although Nick says it ain't strictly etiquette. But our poor luck holds, and every once in a while Denicker would haul out another big one. Nick passes out to me all the alibis he has in stock, he changes his bait, and he skitters as skillful as he knows how. But nothing happens in the way of fish.

"I thought you was a fisherman, Nick?" says I.

"Hang it all!" says he; "I thought so, too. He must have the only good spot in the lake."

"We'll fix that," says I.

With that I hails Doc. Denicker, displays the pocket flask I'd brought on purpose, and inside of three minutes we'd established friendly relations.

"It's this way," explains the Doc., wipin' his mouth careful and handin' back what was left in the flask, which ain't enough to give a flea an eye wash. "You don't want to use none of them limber poles like you got there. Nor no fancy reel. What you need for pickerel is a stiff bamboo. Then you put the butt of it again your belly, like this, drop your bait clear to th' bottom, and start wigglin'. So."

And say, I'll be hanged if he don't pull a two-foot pickerel right from under our boat. Maybe Nick don't look simple, too. He watches Denicker careful, though, and says perhaps he can get the same effect with his jointed rod. But he don't. No matter how he wiggles the bait up from the bottom, nothing comes with it. And Doc. Denicker continues to hoist out big pickerel from all around us. Every time he does it, too, he cocks one of them bad eyes at Nick and leers gloatin'. Nick, he gets red clear back of the ears. Finally he announces that he's

had enough for the day, and we rows back to where we'd left the car, with not even a hornpout to show for our day's sport.

"I believe there must be something in Denicker's theory about using a stiff bamboo pole," says he.

"And I expect, then, you got to be built proper," says I. "You need a meat-safe like his to rest the butt against. Even with that, it looks like there's quite a trick to catchin' pickerel."

"Trick!' says he. "I assure you, Shorty, it's an art."

I hardly got another word out of him all the way home. He seems to be thinkin' hard and deep. I let him chew over it, wonderin' whether he'd come right out and admit he was mistaken about being enough of a fisherman to warrant anything better than a witchhazel pole with the bark on, or if he'd keep it to himself.

Anyway, I was lookin' for him to change that trip to the Maine woods into a tour through the White Mountains, or maybe a week at Atlantic City. So a few days later I drops around again, sort of casual. Phyllis says he's out in the back yard. He is. I finds him standing on the stone wall, the end of a bamboo pole against his belt, and the hook and line dropped into the next lot.

"Well, how are the field mice bitin' today, Nick?" I asks.

And he sure does look foolish when he sees me grinnin' at him.

"I suppose you can guess what I'm doing, Shorty?" says he.

"I expect you're practicin' the Doc. Denicker wiggle, eh?" says I.

"You bet!" says he. "And if I can get it I mean to put over a new one on some of those Maine guides."

"Oh ho!" says I. "I didn't know but you'd decided you wasn't a fisherman, after all."

"A fisherman," says Nick, "is one who fishes and has faith, whether he catches anything or not."

"Then I guess you're qualified," says I.

So Phyllis is dragged off into the wilds again. The Royces was gone a couple of weeks and durin' that time Sadie spills more or less words of sympathy for the dainty little wife.

"Just think!" says she. "Way off there in the woods, with probably not another woman within miles, and nothing to do but fight black flies and mosquitoes and sit around some rough camp! I should think she would be bored to death, and if she doesn't get pneumonia or something dreadful it will be a wonder."

I'll admit that them was about my sentiments, too. And then here last night they came breezin' in on us; Nick looking huskier than ever, and Phyllis all tanned up, with the pink showin' in her cheeks and her eyes sparklin'.

"Just look!" says she, producin' a birch-bark basket and openin' it to let loose a loud smell of arsenic and other perfumes. "A five-pound black bass that I caught and landed all by myself! Isn't he a beauty? And we are going to have him mounted

to hang over the living room fireplace. Oh, but we did have the best time up there!"

Sadie glances at me and shrugs her shoulders, and I answers by hunchin' mine. Then we admires the fish until Phyllis is willin' I should put it out on the side porch while they goes on with the thrillin' details of the excursion. And after they're gone we burns a few joss sticks, with all the doors and windows open. Neither of us seems to care for the society of a black bass that is due to be a wall decoration some day, but ain't quite arrived at that state.

"Who would have thought," says Sadie, "that Phyllis, of all girls, would take to that sort of thing?"

"Oh, well!" says I. "I expect she's right. If you can't reform 'em you might as well join in. And after all, Nick ain't so bad. Course, I don't accuse him of havin' the seven deadly virtues, but he's rather a decent young chap. He might do worse than fish."

III

HOW THEY GET THAT WAY

"SAY, Shorty," remarks Swifty Joe as I drifts back to the Physical Culture Studio after lunch here the other day, "that Bristow party called up again."

"Yes?" says I. "Told him I couldn't take him on until tomorrow at 3.30, didn't you?"

"Nah," says Swifty, using the port side of his face. "Tried to. But say, he's one of those birds you can't tell anything. Says how he'll be here at 2.15 today and to reserve the rest of the afternoon for him. Then he hangs up."

"Just like that, eh?" says I. "How interestin'!"

"Who is he, anyway?" asks Swifty. "Talks like one of these here new kinks."

"That's what he is, Swifty—a king," says I.

"Ah, wotcha feedin' us!" protests Swifty.

"They're gettin' a little scarce abroad," says I, "but here in the good old United States we got a bumper crop. We've got kings bowcoop, as the Buddies used to say. Kings is what we're long on. And most of us are proud of it."

Swifty gawps at me for a second, rubs his cauliflower ear as a sign that he's lost the trail, and then demands: "Whaddye mean, kinks?"

"Heard of John D., the oil king, haven't you?" says I. "And Mr. Schwab, the steel king? Well, they're only our headliners. We got lots more. There's Henry, of Detroit—he's our flivver king. Then we got pickle kings, and bath-tub kings, and chewing-gum kings, and coal kings, and beef kings, and safety razor kings, and breakfast food kings, and as many more as there are ad. pages in the magazines."

"Ah, them kind!" says Swifty. "They don't bother me none."

"Maybe not," says I; "but you give up to 'em reg'lar, old son; that is, unless you've quit eatin' food, and wearin' clothes, and buyin' things for the flat. No dodgin' their tax collectors. We all pay our share, and because there's so many of us that do is why they're kings."

Swifty shrugs his shoulders careless. That's a bit too deep for him, so he simply lets it slide off. "This Bristow party," says he, "what kind is he?"

"About a third rater," says I. "He's our paper-box king. You don't hear so much about him perhaps, but I happen to know that in his line he's a top-notcher. Anything in pasteboard, from egg containers to the box you lug home your new Klassy Kut suit in, most likely comes from one of his factories. And he runs a chain of pulp mills from the Allegash to Chinook Falls, with enough hands in 'em to outvote any two Tammany districts you could name. Yes, he's some guy, Thomas D. Bristow."

Swifty gets that, all right. In fact, he's im-

pressed. He stares at me dazed. "Wot'll I do then," says he, "when he shows up at 2.15?"

"Why," says I, "give him a chair and let him wait. Give him two chairs if he ain't satisfied, or whittle out a crown for him. Do anything you think ought to be done for a paper-box king."

"Ahr-r r chee!" growls Swifty, registerin' disgust.

He don't believe in talking that way about our truly great men, Swifty. He's got a reverent mind and a loyal soul. Every man accordin' to his bank account, is Swifty's motto, and I expect there's a lot of others who hold the same. I don't know as I always get away from it myself.

But this happens to be one of my busy days. Inside of ten minutes I'm in the gym, workin' away with one of my old reg'lars who has gouty finger joints and a 46 waist measure, but who's willin' to keep pluggin' away at the apparatus and cut down on the red meats until I get him back in shape. Kind of interestin', too, taking these old boys with excess blood pressure, Wall Street livers, peevish digestions and so on, and sweatin' the rubbish out of 'em and gettin' 'em to breathe below the third rib. Maybe not so thrillin' as hammerin' some ambitious comer through the ropes for the big end of the gate receipts, but I reckon it's a lot more useful. And in the long run it pays better. I don't get my picture on the sportin' page so often as I used to when I was wearin' the belt, but I don't have to live around in trainin' camps or mix with

a lot of tinhorn sports, either. And I'll admit I like the job.

So I'd got the old boy well lathered up and was givin' him a ten minutes' breathin' spell, when Swifty sticks his head in the gym door and announces husky: "Say, Shorty, he's here."

"Eh?" says I, lookin' blank at him.

"That kink party—Mr. Bristow," says he.

"Oh, very well," says I. "Lock the safe and tell him to make himself at home. I'll be out in twenty minutes or so."

You know how you'll frame up a picture of someone you've never seen, just on their rep. What I was lookin' for when I finally steps into the front office, was one of these potty old boys with a hand-hewed face and jutty eyebrows. And I expected he'd be pacin' up and down chewin' a black cigar stump and gettin red behind the ears.

So I'm a little jarred when I discovers this busy group spread around my desk. In the swing chair, sort of holdin' forth, as you might say, is this slim, stoop shouldered gent with the long face and the thin nose. It's an odd face, a bit whopper-jawed on one side, deep lines about the mouth corners, and the weirdest pair of buttermilk-blue eyes I ever met. Camped in chairs just beyond are two slick-haired young fellows, one with a lapful of magazines and newspaper clippings, and the other with a notebook on his knee. Leanin' up against the water cooler is Swifty Joe, gawpin' fascinated.

"Well," says I, "reading from left to right, which is Mr. Bristow?"

The long-faced party in the chair looks up, waves the young gent who's readin' something to stop, and remarks in a thin, wavery voice: "I—er—I am Mr. Bristow. And have I the pleasure of meeting Professor McCabe?"

"If that's your idea of pleasure," says I, "you have. McCabe's my name. I wasn't lookin' for you, though, until tomorrow. Maybe Swifty didn't get it to you clear."

"Oh, yes," says Bristow careless. "But today suited me better. You see, Professor, I had heard of you through some business acquaintances; rather important men, by the way. They spoke highly of your methods. Yesterday I decided to take a course with you. I need it. We have been through rather a strenuous period of late, we leaders of industry, if I may so class myself. I've had my share, and it has left me not in the best condition. And on the fifteenth of next month I must go abroad as chairman of the Commission to promote International Fellowship, which I have recently organized. So you see I have no more than three weeks to give you, my dear Professor."

He says it all easy and soothin', them queer eyes wanderin' around as he talks and his slim fingers lacin' and unlacin' restless.

"It didn't strike you I might be all dated up for today, eh?" says I.

"If it did," says he, "I failed to consider it. That can easily be arranged."

"Think so, do you?" says I.

"Of course," says he, "you may need to cancel

other engagements. I quite understand that this may be necessary. But, allow me to add, I am accustomed to paying for what I want—liberally. I would suggest that we start in at once." And he unlimbers himself from the chair.

"Don't rush yourself," says I. "Accordin' to my schedule you don't start in until 3:30 tomorrow, if you start at all. That don't need any diagram, does it?"

You'd think a crisp come-back like that would get him pinkin' up behind the ears. But it don't. He just springs a curious, sappy, crooked smile and flutters his hands at me like he was shooin' a balky settin' hen off the nest.

"Merkins," says he, "my check book." One of the slick-haired young gents passes it over prompt and unscrews a fountain pen. Business of fillin' in. "There!" he goes on, passin' over a baby blue slip. "That will be for the first week; afternoons, from 2 until 4:30."

I glances at the check casual. It's for a round thousand, and I can hear Swifty, who's rubberin' over my shoulder, breathin' hard. I'll admit, too, that's more'n I usually take in for fifteen hours' work. But someway this T. D. Bristow person has stirred up the mulish streak in me. I chucks the slip back on the desk.

"Listen, Mr. Man," says I. "Some of these parties you'd like to have me scratch off without any notice are old reg'lars of mine, who have been coming here to the Studio for years, and are de-

pendin' on me to keep 'em in trim. Besides, most of 'em are personal friends."

"I beg pardon," says he, a cold look flickerin' into them buttermilk-blue eyes and the thin upper lip tightenin' into a straight line. "Friends, did you say?"

I nods.

"If you will permit me," says he. "They don't exist."

"Eh?" says I, and I expect it left me with my mouth open.

"Oh, it's a persistent and popular fallacy, friendship," says he; "but really, there is no such thing."

"Since when?" says I.

"I suppose that condition has been going on since Adam," says he, smilin' sort of satisfied with himself. "Merkins, take this. You see, my dear Professor, you merely confuse your ideas. One may have congenial acquaintances, as well as those who are uncongenial. One may have associates, amusing or otherwise. One may even have constant companions who are agreeable, likable, trustworthy in a degree, and more or less loyal. Those we value and cultivate. Or they may be irritating, deceitful, perhaps downright dishonest. That kind we endure because we don't know just how to get rid of them. But friendship, in the sense it is usually used—that implies a personal altruism which simply does not exist."

Having unloaded that, Mr. Bristow leans back in the desk chair and twiddles his lean fingers. He had me goin', all right. I'd followed for a while, then

I got lost. Toward the last I was just scratchin' my head and watchin' Merkins scribble that fish-hook stuff on his pad. I could read one as well as I could understand the other.

Course, I got the main idea. Bristow didn't believe in friends.

"Then you're out of luck, I'll say," says I.

"Most persons seem to think I've been rather fortunate," says Bristow. And Merkins smothers a chuckle.

While debatin' things like that ain't much in my line, and as a rule I'd be too busy, here I had half an hour before my next appointment and I didn't feel like lettin' him get away with any such chesty argument.

"Mean to say, Mr. Bristow," I goes on, "that you never in your life had anybody who stuck by you through rough and smooth, who helped you when you was down, and slapped you on the back when you made a winning—nobody you could call a friend?"

"I think my experience has been the usual one," says he. "There have been men who have been helpful to me at times; and women, too. More have been merely useful. But I am quite certain that none of them, whether consciously or not, but expected me at some time to become useful or helpful to them. That is human nature. We live first for ourselves. It is the underlying law of every living thing, from protoplasm to philanthropist. And when we talk of friends—well, we are simply fooling ourselves."

"You must have bumped up against a lot of hard boiled eggs in your time," says I, "to feel that way about it. What's your substitute for friends, anyway—secretaries?" and I jerks my thumb toward the slick-haired pair.

"Hardly," says Bristow. "I use my secretaries as brain extensions. Most successful men do. They must, unless they are content to be partial successes. For every man of large affairs should have wide interests. I find all sorts of knowledge useful to me, even in the making of paper boxes. I must keep up with events and ideas. But there are only so many hours in the day and I have but one brain. So I hire other brains, as I need them. At present I have six personal secretaries, aside from those in my business offices. Two are always with me. I may have a valuable thought which should not be lost. I may want something looked up. Then I must be informed as to the news of the day, and what the magazines are printing. I have poetry read to me at odd moments; book reviews, art notes, dramatic criticisms.

"My fads I take care of in a similar way. An active mentality is bound to have fads. They are the escape valves. But of course I cannot devote to them the time that they demand. So I hire experts to look after my fads. Poppy raising is one. Perhaps you have seen the Tom Bristow double fringed scarlet poppy? No? Well, I have been awarded two first prizes for it, and I pay my head gardener three thousand a year. Collecting pencil studies is another of my fads. A bankrupt art dealer

gave me the idea; said it would be an original thing to do. So I hired him at a good salary and he makes a monthly report of the treasures he picks up for me. This summer he made a great find—two sketches of an old lady in a chair, by some chap by the name of Whistler. So you see, McCabe, if you can buy what you want, why delude yourself with the fiction of friendship?"

"Why, I guess I never thought much about it," says I. "Might be worth lookin' into, this idea of yours. I've always supposed, though, that a few of my friends was the real thing, and if I've been kiddin' myself along——"

"You surely have been, McCabe," breaks in Bristow. "Just for example now, suppose you pick out one person whom you could call a real friend."

I don't know why, but off-hand I looks around for Swifty Joe Gallagher. He ain't in sight, though. I expect seein' me turn down that big check was too much for him and he's gone back into the gym and shut the door. But I names him, just the same.

"Ah, yes!" says Bristow, smilin'. "Your paid assistant. What makes you think he is a true friend?"

"Well," says I, "he's always gone through the motions, ever since I picked him off a park bench. One of my gang of rubbers, Swifty was, once. He'd started out to be a pug, himself, over in South Brooklyn. A handy boy he was with the mitts, too, and good on footwork. If it hadn't been for a streak of yellow in him maybe he'd made good. But he couldn't stand punishment; and at 25 he found him-

self hangin' around trainin' camps, with no trade, no steady job and a hearty appetite. When I ran across him, about as I was startin' the Studio, he was down and out. I took him on and he ain't missed a meal since. He ain't ever said much about being grateful. I doubt if he knows the word. But it's there. I've never had much call to try him out, but I expect there ain't anything I could ask Swifty Joe to do for me that he wouldn't make a stab at."

Mr. Bristow shrugs his shoulders. "Try that on a stray dog and you'll get results equally satisfactory," says he. "A helper and a dependent cannot be a real friend."

"I'd bank strong on Swifty in a pinch," says I.

"It would be interesting to arrange a test," says Bristow. "Merkins, can you suggest something?"

Merkins can. He's an ingenious young gent, and I suspect is a movie fan and maybe tried his hand at scenario writin'. After thinkin' only a minute he sketches out a neat little plot.

"Do you agree to try that?" asks Bristow.

"Go on, stage it," says I.

So when Swifty is called in I'm discovered with my overcoat and hat on, standin' by the door registerin' suppressed grief.

"Gallagher," says Mr. Bristow, "how would you like to take charge of this establishment?"

"Me?" says Swifty, his mouth droppin' open. "Why—why—what about Shorty McCabe?"

Then Bristow springs his tale about how I've been speculatin' in stock and not only lost my pile,

but given out a lot of notes I can't meet, hintin' that he's bought 'em up and taken over the Studio.

"I've been having a talk with Professor McCabe," goes on Bristow, "and find that I would not care to have him continue as manager. His methods would not suit me at all. So I am requesting him to leave at once. I am prepared to offer you twice your present salary to take his place."

He's no rapid fire thinker, Swifty. The speed of his mental reactions is about equal to the gait of a turtle in low gear. For a minute he stands there gawpin', first at me and then at Bristow. Then he acts like he was tryin' to swallow a crust of bread. Finally he separates himself from the words that have been cloggin' the works.

"Ah-r-chee!" he snorts. "Wotcher take me for?"

"Do I understand, my man," asks Bristow, "that you decline?"

"Sure," says Swifty. "If Shorty gets the chuck I goes wit' him. See?"

"Just a moment," puts in Bristow. "Perhaps you imagine that he may make a new start somewhere else. What if that should prove impossible? What if he had used other people's money in his speculations—some of yours, it might be—and might end his career in jail?"

"It's a frame-up, that's all," says Swifty. "I know Shorty as well as I knows myself, and take it from me, they don't make 'em any straighter. As for me workin' for a fish-eyed crook like you, nothin' doing. Come on, Shorty. I got a little

wad stowed away in the Savin's Bank, and a few Liberty bonds we can cash in, and——"

Well, there I had to crash in. I was gettin' dewy in the eyes and I felt like I had a bone in my throat. "Say, Bristow, I guess this has gone far enough, ain't it?" says I. "Don't let 'em kid you, Swifty. You're a good scout, all right, and everything is just as it was before the rehearsal started. Only I expect you've qualified in Class A."

"Eh?" says Swifty, still doin' the open face act. "Wha—what's the grand little idea? Was—was that tale of his about you bein' on the rocks all bunk?"

"Absolutely," says I. "It was raw stuff to pull on you, I'll admit, but Mr. Bristow and me was havin' a little debate about whether or not there was such a thing as friends, and when I mentions you as one I thought I could count on, he had this merry notion about puttin' you through the acid test. Now I hope he's satisfied."

"Huh!" says Swifty. "Ain't he got friends of his own he could practice on?"

"Mr Bristow doesn't believe in friends," says I. "Says they don't exist."

Swifty eyes him curious while he takes a deep breath or two. Then he observes from the south corner of his mouth: "Say, how does he get that way?"

"He's just been tellin' me, Swifty," says I. "He's discovered somewhere that folks are friendly for what there is in it. Says we're all made like that.

Also that whatever he wants he can go out and buy. Do I get it straight, Mr. Bristow?"

He nods.

"How about you, Shorty?" demands Swifty. "You don't fall for that stuff, do you?"

"No," says I. "If I'd had any inclinations that way, you'd have cured me just now. I guess I got to stick to believin' in friends. I hope I have a few here and there, such as they are. Anyway, there's you and Pinckney. Odd combination you two make. About as much alike as a clam and a cucumber. I wouldn't claim either of you was perfect, either. You'll admit you ain't any parlor ornament, Swifty, and there's a few little points about polite refinement that you ain't sopped up yet. While as for Pinckney Ogden Bruce, he's about as useless and scatter-brained as an Airedale pup. But I wouldn't like to lose either of you from my list. Funny, ain't it?

"I'm just beginnin' to dope out the answer. You might take this, Merkins. Maybe Mr. Bristow could make something out of it. For it strikes me that if all of us demanded perfect parties for friends there'd be few of us who'd deserve 'em. As it is, we seem to like 'em for what they are, the good along with the bad. Anyway, mine must take me that way."

"You'll pardon me, Professor," says Bristow, "if I do not agree with you."

"If you did," says I, "I'd begin to suspect myself."

He comes back with another of them crooked smiles, but it's kind of a sickly attempt. "I have no intention of trying to force my theories on anyone," says he. "But to get back to more concrete affairs: What about those afternoons? Suppose I make it fifteen hundred?"

"No use," says I. "That's one of the things you can't wave your check book and get. I wouldn't try to sell you fifteen hundred dollars' worth of health, Mr. Bristow, because I couldn't deliver the goods."

"May I ask why you could not?" says he.

"I wouldn't press that if I was you," says I.

"But I do," says he.

"All right, then, I'll have to give it to you," says I. "Your complaint is common enough these days, and it's something that exercise and diet and deep breathing won't touch. You've got a bad case of money on the brain complicated by bats in the belfry. Too many fool ideas that you think are chunks of solid wisdom, and too chronic a habit of going out to buy the world. I can think of only one treatment that would help."

"Yes?" says Bristow, lettin' on to be amused. "And that is?"

"Sue some newspaper for libel," says I, "and let 'em put you on the witness stand."

I don't mind sayin' either, that I took more or less satisfaction in handin' that to Thomas D. Bristow. But Swifty, after chewin' a lead pencil for near two hours and coverin' the whole back of a

calendar, figures out how my fun cost me something like $489 a minute.

"Stop your ticklin', Swifty," says I. "You make me feel like a plute."

IV

WHY THE AMMI LINE KEEPS ON

COURSE, I'll admit that when it comes to mixin' in society affairs I'm a flivver. I expect I'm about as useful and ornamental at a pink tea or a dinner dance as an expert horseshoer would be on a battleship. It's all out of my line. Absolutely.

Now down at the Physical Culture Studio it's easy for me to kid myself into thinkin' I'm some guy; for there I know what I'm doing, and my old reg'lars hail me respectful as "Professor McCabe," or "Shorty," dependin' on how long they've known me. And even when I give off opinions about politics, or the state of the market, or how the big strike will come out, they stretch an ear. But when I button myself into open front evenin' clothes and crash in where the orchestra is jazzin' away behind the palms and the patronesses are standin' stately in a row, and the butler is towin' in new arrivals—well, that's when my battin' average takes a big slump.

And yet, being one of the leadin' commuters of Rockhurst-on-the-Sound—that is, I'm generally first off the 6:03 at night—and chairman of the house committee at the Yacht and Country Club, I can't

seem to duck appearin' at these festive occasions now and then. Besides, Mrs. McCabe wouldn't stand for my side-steppin' 'em, if I could.

That's my alibi for gettin' tangled up in this three-sided Ammi Ruhamah episode so bad, and playin' such a prominent part in a silly game that I should have had sense enough to leave to the old dowagers and the young matrons to settle. No, Ammi Ruhamah wasn't one of these theosophy lecturers, nor a Far East poet draped in 'steen yards of dish-toweling and a bonnet that looked like it had been put on in the accident ward. Nothing like that. And while you're scratchin' your head I'll begin back where Sadie calls me one side durin' our Hunter's moon dance at the Club and starts dealin' out the gentle reproof.

"Shorty," says she, "I notice that your young Mr. Bedford Ames is here again tonight."

"Why not?" says I. "Ain't he one of the new members now? And if he can do this jazz stuff with his feet as well as he can sail Brick Hartley's knockabout, I guess——"

"That's precisely the trouble with him," breaks in Sadie. "He does dance very well. But he dances too much with Dixie Patten."

"Does he?" says I. "Well, I hadn't noticed the young lady gettin' sulky over it."

"Perhaps not," says Sadie. "But I may as well tell you, Shorty, that it won't do. Dixie's aunt doesn't like it at all and I think you had better drop him a hint."

"Eh?" says I, gawpin'. "Me? Ah, say! Since

when did I qualify as a he-chaperone? Quit your kiddin', Sadie."

But that's the last thing she has in mind. Inside of three minutes I've had it put straight to me that this is serious business. For, accordin' to her, Dixie is as good as engaged to Oggie Gibbs. They got that way down at White Sulphur early last Spring. And didn't Oggie spend a whole week in Lexington, Ky., being entertained by Aunt Alicia Patten and playin' around with Dixie? He did. Which is why Auntie is stayin' north so long this Fall. And now this Bedford Ames person seems likely to decant the whole dish of beans.

"Good work if he did, too, if you ask me," says I.

"But no one is asking you, Shorty," is the smooth come-back I get from Sadie. "Dixie's aunt much prefers young Mr. Gibbs."

"Shows her poor taste, then," says I. "I'll admit that Oggie is some headliner when it comes to figurin' on incomes, but it was all wished on him by a fond grandmother. Also his displacement must be near 200 pounds. But when you've said that you've told about all. So far as I've discovered Oggie don't carry much between the ears, unless it's water ballast. He's what I call a mental dud, Oggie."

Sadie shrugs her shoulders. "Perhaps you are prejudiced, Shorty," says she. "Sometimes you are, you know. And as for young Mr. Ames, just who is he anyway? Runs a mill up in Vermont, doesn't he?"

"Chair fact'ry," says I. "Any kind of chairs, from porch rockers to veneered back foldin' opera

house seats. Turns out a car-load a day. And he's a live wire, Bedford is. He's opened a Broadway sales office and is gettin' orders hand over fist. Landed a fat one from our school board. That's how me and Brick Hartley got to know him."

"Quite thrilling!" says Sadie. "But I rather suspect that Miss Alicia Patten has other ambitions for Dixie than to have her marry a man who runs a chair factory. The Pattens, you know, are one of the oldest families in Kentucky. Dixie's grandfather was a governor, or something; one of her uncles was a senator, and her father was Judge Patten. The line goes way back, I hear."

"Yes, you'd be bound to hear about it if it did," says I. "Trust anybody south of Trenton for that. And I ain't denyin' but what Dixie is some cute little queen, all right. But then, Bedford Ames ain't so hard to look at himself, is he?"

Sadie shakes her head. "Being a man," says she, "of course you couldn't be expected to understand. Young Mr. Ames may be rather a nice young fellow, but he is hardly the match for Dixie that Ogden Gibbs would make, and if he doesn't want to spoil her prospects—well, he must be told, that's all."

"That being the case," says I, "somebody besides me has got to do the tellin'. I'm backin' Bedford both ways."

So that lines me up with the opposition. Not that I meant to kick into the affair personally, or pull any wires for my favorite. I'd be sure to bug things up if I did. But if there was any rootin' to be done

along the side-lines I knew who I was lettin' out the hollers for.

Maybe I wore kind of a satisfied grin, too, as I stands in the smokin' room door and watches young Ames and Miss Dixie pairin' off for about two dances out of five. He's a tall, straight, well-built young chap, quiet spoken and well-mannered, without being any parlor hound. And when she drapes one arm around his shoulder and they float off to a fox-trot tune they make kind of a well-mated couple, to my way of thinkin'.

Across the ball room I got glimpses of a group that I can guess holds a different opinion. Aunt Alicia is in the middle, with her pointed Kentucky chin well in the air and her black eyes flashin' ominous. Consolin' her on one side is Mrs. Boomer-Day and on the other is Sadie and Mrs. Purdy Pell. I couldn't just see how they was goin' to break up the combination, unless they formed a flyin' wedge and gave Bedford the low tackle when he wasn't lookin'. And of course they don't try that.

As for Oggie Gibbs, he seems to be flutterin' around with various sweet young things. No trouble at all for Oggie to find substitutes, it seems. And if he was sore at Dixie for playin' somebody else for first place he don't show it. Maybe the fact hadn't trickled through into the vacuum yet. Anyway, he dances once or twice with her when his turn comes, after which she just naturally drifts off with young Ames again, and for an hour or more they seems to be missin' altogether.

Well, if the opposition had been stirred up before

you can bet that by now they was on the warpath for fair. I could see 'em with their heads together, probably plottin' an offensive of some kind. Once I strolls past, but not too near, and favors Sadie with a grin, which was kind of a reckless thing to do. But I got away with it and dodges out on the east veranda, where I finds Oggie Gibbs wanderin' around sort of aimless, like he'd parted his moorings and was being carried out with the tide. Next thing I know he's hailed me.

"Oh, I say, McCabe," says he, "I—ah—I'm looking for Miss Patten."

"Are you?" says I. "Well, how's the lookin'?"

"I beg pardon?" says he.

"What luck you having?" says I.

"None at all," says he. "That's why I mentioned it, you know. And as this is the supper dance I really must find her, you see. I—ah—I'm supposed to be taking care of her, and all that. Deuced awkward, what?"

"Cheer up," says I. "Maybe you're being helped out unbeknown."

"Eh?" says Oggie, starin' at me with all the lively intelligence of a stuffed fish.

"Never mind, Oggie," says I, "when it comes down to sympathy you're pullin' down the big end." And I leaves him with his mouth still open while I goes chucklin' into the Trophy room where Brick Hartley is tellin' that one about the old salt who was visitin' ashore and tried to drive a mule.

Must have been half an hour or more later when this stag session of ours broke up and I was on

my way to hunt up Sadie and suggest that as it's after midnight maybe we might as well be toddlin' toward home. It was while I was hangin' up by the ball-room door that I spot a young couple appear from a dark corner of the veranda and part with a lingerin' hand squeeze. Uh-huh. It's Dixie Patten and young Ames. As she pushes past me and makes for Auntie with her ears all pinked up Bedford grabs me by the arms and whispers something husky.

"You're what?" says I, not quite catchin' him.

"I'm in and out of luck at the same time," says he. "And I need your help, Shorty."

"Want somebody to hold the other hand?" I asks.

He laughs easy. "Hardly," says he. "You must have had a glimpse of something?"

"Just a flicker over my shoulder," says I. "But I judged you'd been findin' the party a pleasant one."

"Glorious!" says he. "And I've also found out who is the finest little girl in the world."

"Yes," says I, "we put up that porch swing special for making discoveries like that. It's been quite a success, I understand, for the past four seasons."

"But this is the real thing, Shorty," says he. "Dixie and I—well, she's some girl."

"No debate," says I. "Comes from a fine old Southern fam'ly, too, as Aunt Alicia will tell you if she gets a chance."

"That's the difficult part of this business—Aunt Alicia," says Bedford solemn.

"What a grand little guesser you are!" says I.

"Oh, she's made it plain enough," says he. "I've been in range of those black eyes of hers more than once. But I haven't been worrying about her until I found out how I stood with Dixie. And now that I know—well, there's something that Auntie must be asked to tell Dixie about—about me."

"How simple!" says I. "I should say that would be the easiest thing Auntie did. Persuadin' her will be more or less of a cinch. All you got to do is to ramble over to Aunt Alicia, spill it to her confidential, and——"

"But that's the point, Shorty," he breaks in. "It—it's something I couldn't possibly tell to anyone's aunt."

"Eh?" says I. "Bad as that? Ah, come! You don't strike me as a young chap with a past that needs formaldehyde on it."

"Thanks, Shorty," says he. "It isn't exactly my past; that is, my own particular and personal past. Still——"

By that time we'd edged out toward the veranda rail and I'd hoisted myself up on it with my back comfortable against a post.

"Go on, Bedford," says I. "Shoot."

"To take a flying start," says he, "my respected grandfather was rather a queer old scout."

"Many of 'em was," says I. "What was his

line? Collectin' horses from the neighbors, or sportin' too many wives at once?"

"Nothing like that," says Bedford. "He was Deacon Ames and he carried his religion round with him seven days a week. During the Civil War he got to be a colonel or something of the sort. Afterwards he started the chair factory."

"Oh, well," says I, "somebody had to make chairs, I expect. He might have done worse."

Bedford waves this aside. "His full name," he goes on, "was Ammi Ruhamah Ames."

"That was something to stagger along under," says I. "Did they call him after one of the signs of the Zodiac, or was it a trottin' horse?"

"Here is where we really do dip into the past," says Bedford. "My grandfather Ames wasn't the only Ammi Ruhamah in the family. He was the third, I believe, and there have been two more since."

"Kind of run to that monicker, do you?" says I.

"Worse than that," says Bedford. "It was merely a habit at first, a tradition. I hope I shan't bore you, Shorty, if I tell you how it started. It seems that the early Ameses settled in Topsfield, Mass., after they quit the Plymouth bunch. That's not far from Salem, you know; and Salem is where they had that pleasant little custom of burning witches. You've read all about that, of course?"

"Well, I'm a little vague on the subject," I admits, "but I expect I've heard it sketched out. Boom along."

"Rummy old codgers, those Puritans, eh?" says

Bedford. "The witch burning fad spread to other places. Topsfield got it. Didn't mean to be out of style, I suppose. And, as near as I can figure, the way it worked out was something like this: If you got sore on a neighbor for any reason, and wanted to get square with him, you began to throw out hints that his wife was a little queer in the head. Maybe you'd seen her making soap without any fire under the kettle; or you'd heard her talking with a black crow, who was probably none other than the Old Boy himself; or some one had said they'd seen her taking a joy ride on a broom stick. They were ingenious at making up weird tales like that. And all you had to do to start something was to whisper a few things of the sort around after meeting.

"Well, that's what they did for the wife of an original Ames. I've forgotten just how many times a great-great-grandmother of mine she was. Bright, clever old girl she was, I understand; a trifle too bright to be popular. Tongue a bit too sharp. Anyway, they wished this witch business on her. There was a trial and she was promptly found guilty. They nearly always found 'em guilty. She was about to be sentenced to be burned at the stake, too, when Great-great-granddaddy Ames rose in court to make a few remarks. He wasn't rash enough to question the honesty of the judges or the value of the evidence. It might be so that his wife was a witch. He hadn't noticed it himself; but then, perhaps he didn't know a witch when he saw one. And if she really was a witch, as the honor-

able court had decided, it might be best to burn her. That was the law, and he was as strong for the law as anyone. And yet, if the sentence should be carried out there would arise a certain complication of which the learned judges had not been informed. He thought it only just to the court to put them wise. For the fact was that the lady in question—well, he expected her soon to add another Ames to the family, and the judges could see for themselves that if she was to be burned next Friday on the cow commons an innocent life would be sacrificed, perhaps an heir to the house of Ames. All of which would be distinctly unfair to him as a father, and to the coming heir. It would be judicial murder, no less, and he was sure the court meant to do nothing of the kind.

"Rather a nice point, eh? Anyway, it was a winner. Sentence was suspended and the bonfire was postponed indefinitely. In fact, it never came off, or I wouldn't be bothering you now. And sure enough, it proved to be an heir. Naturally the shrewd old boy was rather grateful. Also he knew his Old Testament very well, for when it came to naming the youngster what did he do but dig out this Ammi Ruhamah stuff—Hosea II-i. It means, you know, 'My people, having obtained mercy.' Pat enough, but, as you suggest, a good deal of a name. They didn't care much, though, how they loaded down their children in those days. My Great-great-granddaddy grew up as Ammi Ruhamah Ames. And when he had a son he had him christened Ammi Ruhamah, too. And so on. They seemed to do

fairly well with the name, or in spite of it. One got to be governor, another was foreign minister to some country, and most of them kept out of jail. None got to be very rich, though.

"It was my own grandfather, however, who seemed to take this name custom seriously. He made my father promise to call his first son Ammi Ruhamah and to see that the name was handed on down. So my older brother was another to call his first son Ammi Ruhamah and how they did kid him about it at college. And he had already promised to give his first boy the name. But he needn't have worried about that. He was a first lieutenant in the Yankee Division and got his early in the muss near Soissons, while I was still down in Texas learning to land an army plane without crashing into the landscape.

"Tough about Ammi. He was a good scout, if there ever was one. Broke us all up a lot. Especially Dad. And when I got home he put this up to me about carrying on the name. Of course I said I would. It didn't seem much to promise, and I thought very little of it at the time. But now—well, since I've met Dixie and we've as good as settled things, it—it looks different. As for me, I'm rather used to the name. Hardly strikes me as odd. But she might think that Ammi Ruhamah was rather dreadful. Anyway, she ought to know, and it's something I can't tell her myself. Now can I, Shorty—the whole thing, about the witch trial and everything?"

"No," says I, "I don't see how you could, ex-

actly. And if you'll excuse me, Bedford, I don't feel quite up to the job, either. It's flatterin' to be asked, I know, but——"

"No, no!" put in Bedford hastily. "Certainly not. But I thought you might tell it to Mrs. McCabe, and get her to—er—break the news."

"Yes, I might do that," says I. "But she's on the other side, you know. Besides, if you don't mind my sayin' so, it's kind of a fishy tale. And I might not get it all straight."

"Oh, for that matter," says he, "it's all down in a book—'Frothingham's History of Salem, Mass.' I could dig up a copy for you tomorrow."

"All right," says I. "Give me all the documents in the case and I'll see that they're filed. But if I was you I'd kind of brace myself for a blast from Auntie. From all I can hear she's got you crossed off already, on account of the chair fact'ry, and when she gets the details of this Ammi Ruhamah business I look for her to take Dixie by the hand and start for Kentucky. If you insist, though, I'll make the play."

Which I did. And Sadie sits up half the night readin' about that witch trial. Then she starts out for a confab with Aunt Alicia. And when I come home that evening I find her beamin'.

"Well," says I. "I expect you've got it all fixed up how Bedford is to be ditched?"

"Don't be absurd, Shorty," says she. "We've fixed up nothing of the kind. In fact, Mrs. Purdy Pell is inviting him out for the next week-end. Miss Alicia and Dixie will be there, too."

"Eh?" I gasps.

"Do you know," says Sadie, "we have found that he comes from a most distinguished New England family, real Plymouth Rock stock. Why, the Ameses are entitled to sport a coat of arms, and all that."

"Oh!" says I, gettin' a sudden light on this quick shift.

"And just think, Shorty," she goes on, "of inheriting a name that has been handed down for two hundred years! Now, that's what I call an honest-to-goodness ancestry. But why didn't he tell about it at the start?"

"Who, Bedford?" says I. "Not a chance. I don't know exactly why, either. But I expect that up in Vermont it ain't being done."

V

TWO GUESSES ON MARTHA

IT didn't seem as though it could be so, but all the signs read that Pinckney had something on his mind. For one thing he hadn't favored me with a foolish remark for at least four minutes. He'd just been sittin' there in the front office of the Physical Culture Studio, holdin' a cigarette at arm's length between his thumb and forefinger, and starin' at it like it was one of these crystal gazin' balls.

Also he'd chuckled twice, and Pinckney only chuckles out loud when things are goin' wrong. When he's really pleased or amused he takes it out in twistin' his mouth around and hunchin' his eyebrows; but when something serious is happenin' to him, such as discoverin' that his man has put pearl cuff links in his afternoon shirt, or that the butler has used the wrong kind of vinegar in the salad dressin', then he disguises his real feelin's by makin' this queer noise in his throat. At the second chuckle I turns my head around to get a better look.

"Ah, come!" says I. "Spill it."

"Eh? I—I beg pardon?" says he, coming out

of the spell gradual. "Oh, yes! I must have been thinking, Shorty."

"Painful process, ain't it?" says I. " 'Specially when you ain't used to it."

He waves that aside easy, lights a fresh dope stick, and squints at me through a smoke ring. "Shorty," says he, "were you ever troubled by an elderly female relative who had developed a social complex?"

"I ain't sure," says I. "I remember an aunt who was a snuff dipper."

"No," says he, "I fear you do not quite grasp the meaning of social complex. It's a Freudian term, and is used to indicate a person who—— But perhaps it would be simpler to tell you directly about Cousin Martha."

"What?" says I. "The nice lookin' little old girl with the silver hair and the live-wire eyes? You don't mean to tell me her gears are out of mesh?"

"Only in the Freudian sense, if at all," says Pinckney. "Any complex is difficult to determine, you know. And hers takes a peculiar turn. She insists that New York is not a fit place in which to live."

"It's lucky they can't put you in the nut works for that," says I. "If they could there wouldn't be enough barred windows to go around."

Pinckney shrugs his shoulders. "Oh, I understand," says he. "With young children growing up it's different. But Cousin Martha has no such excuse."

He's perfectly serious about this. Anybody who

can live in New York and don't—— Well, there must be something the matter with 'em. Course, it's all right enough to be away two or three months in the Summer, or to have a country place like his Hickory Top joint up in Connecticut where you can run out for the week-end; but not to be within walkin' distance of Fifth Avenue most of the year, not to have one or two clubs where you call the doorman by his first name—that's his idea of a dull gray existence. You might as well be a potato sproutin' in some cellar.

I happened to be in on the little debate he had with this Cousin Martha when she first showed up, a month or so back. She's a cousin of his mother's, as a matter of fact, a widow. Her hubby had been a banker in some one-horse burg up state—some place like Cohoes, or Skaneateles, or Malone—and when he'd checked out, ten years or so ago, Martha had begun this globe trottin' act of hers.

First off she'd only been rung in on one of these sixty-day steamer trips; where they hustle you through the Orient and back, allowin' you time to buy picture postcards in Cairo, Constantinople and Bombay. She'd gone with an old friend who was principal of a girls' boardin' school. She'd had to be urged a good deal, at that. But once she found how easy it was to pack a steamer trunk and flit off to foreign parts she seemed to get the habit. The next season she spent doin' the Riviera and she came back to the one-horse burg for only long enough to sell out the old double-breasted mansion with the jig-saw decorations, and scandalize the

members of the Sewing Circle by puffin' at a cork-tipped cigarette when tea was served. That winter she had a villa at Biarritz, wherever that is. And so it had gone on since.

"If you please, Cousin Martha," demands Pinckney, "why do you do it?"

She cocks her head on one side perky and favors him with one of her quizzin' smiles. "Why, my dear Pinckney," says she. "I am enjoying the freedom of the late fifties. You see, while Abner was alive we led a most proper and well ordered life. The sun, moon and stars in their orbits were not more regular. At 8:30 every week day morning Abner left home for the bank. He returned at 5:15. For more than twenty years we had supper at exactly six o'clock. On the first Thursday of every month I entertained the Circle. When I had but one maid we washed Mondays, ironed Tuesdays, cleaned house Wednesdays, and baked Saturdays. When I had two we did the same. I remember but two occasions when the schedule was broken. Once Abner took me to New York and I saw 'The Old Homestead' at the Academy of Music, and once we went to Syracuse to attend his brother's funeral. Abner was a good man, a kind husband—but twenty years of six o'clock suppers had worn a groove into which I fitted as a snail in its shell. I didn't know it until I escaped by accident. And I have never eaten at 6 o'clock since."

"But just where have you been during the last two years?" asks Pinckney.

"Oh, wandering about, waiting for Europe, Asia

and Africa to settle down," says Cousin Martha. "I spent a delightful eight months in Japan. Then I crossed to Honolulu, expecting to stay a week, and lingered there a whole season. Next down the west coast of South America. I was charmed with Lima. And coming back I spent a winter in Colon. Now I am waiting to hear if it is safe to go back to my villa on the outskirts of Algiers. But they say the desert tribes are still restive. It was one of their raids which drove me out, you know. We could see them from the upper windows, rushing in from the white hills, and for ten days we lived behind barricaded gates, practically besieged. I do hope they will calm down soon, so that I may go back."

"Go back!" echoes Pinckney. "That is what I fail to understand, Martha. There's no necessity for you to live in such remote and utterly impossible places, is there? You haven't been banished, or anything. You haven't bartered your birthright for a mess of potash——"

"Pottage, my dear Pinckney," puts in Cousin Martha.

"Quite the same," says Pinckney. "Anyway, why exile yourself?"

Her answer to that is simple. She kind of likes it, for one thing; besides, she has to live somewhere. The old home town won't do any longer. She's off them Hick stations for good. And as for settlin' down in New York, as Pinckney suggests, she really couldn't. She doesn't care for our town and never did.

"But why?" insists Pinckney.

"If you must know," says Cousin Martha, "I think New York is perfectly horrid. You call it a great city. I don't. It's big enough, goodness knows. But it isn't urban, as Havana is. That's a real city. So is Buenos Aires. And Cairo and Tokyo and Madrid. But New York is an overgrown country town, full of countrified people mixed indiscriminately with the scum of many nations; a crude, noisy mob living in a crude, noisy manner. A sorry mess, I find it."

Pinckney gasps at that. He stares at Cousin Martha as if she'd thrown an egg at the statue of George Washington or committed high treason.

"Oh, I say!" he protests. "Those are just your silly prejudices, that's all. And you have them because you don't really know New York. You haven't tried living here. And you should. It isn't decent for a lone woman of your years to go wandering around the face of the earth the way you do. Positively, it isn't. Come, give us a trial."

His proposition was that Cousin Martha unpack her trunks at his house and stick out the rest of the winter. He was willin' to bet, too, that inside of two months she wouldn't want to live anywhere else in the world. And Cousin Martha had smiled and said that to please him she would take a chance.

Most folks would, for if anybody in this burg lives comfy and elegant it's the Lionel Pinckney Ogden Bruces. Course, their big old brownstone house is on Madison and not Fifth, and they don't splurge on annual crushes that win columns of space in the society doin's; but Pinckney's been a box

subscriber to the opera and horse show since he came of age, and Mrs. Bruce's twelve-plate dinner parties are admitted to be the last word in polite feedin'. So if there was any place where Cousin Martha could see New York at its best, Pinckney's was the spot. Yet here he is shakin' his head over her.

"She will persist in poking around in such queer places," says he. "Yesterday she was down on the lower East Side and saw the police rounding up a gang of gunmen. Coming home she got mixed up in a crush on the Third Avenue L and watched the guards put off some car rowdies. The day before she went with some friend who has charge of a settlement house and sat all through a session of police court. Told us all about the long line of prisoners—drunks, thieves, street walkers and so on—at dinner that night. And today she's missing again. She was to have lunched with us at the Plutoria at 1:30, but she never came. Heaven knows where she is."

"Lively old girl, I'll say," says I. "Maybe this time she's——"

Just then the 'phone rings and I answers it. "For you, Pinckney," says I, handin' over the receiver. "Mrs. Bruce on the wire."

"What!" says Pinckney, after listenin' a minute. "You don't mean it. Yes, I'll go right down." Then he turns to me. "It's Cousin Martha again. She's held at Police Headquarters."

"Maybe she's been overheard statin' her opinion of the town," I suggests.

But that wasn't quite the case. "Suspicious character," says the detective sergeant who brought her in. "I got her up in a department store where I was laying for Albany Annie, one of the slickest lady dips in the business. I was just nippin' Annie, with her fingers on a gold mesh purse, when this other one interfered and started giving me a line of talk. One of the same gang, I expect, so I brought her along. She's in havin' her thumb autographs printed."

Course, it would have been satisfyin' to have pointed out to him how he was all right except for too much bone in the head, but it wouldn't have got us anywhere. Instead I hunts up a deputy commissioner that I happens to know, explains who Pinckney is, has him make an affidavit that this is a cousin of his in good standing, and in the course of an hour or so we are allowed to lead Martha out into Mulberry Street and hail a taxi.

"Just as a matter of curiosity, Cousin Martha," says Pinckney, "why did you interfere?"

"Because," says Martha, "the woman was so well dressed and had such nice eyes. The officer was rather rough about it, too. He grabbed her by the wrist. Now there was no necessity for that, was there?" And she turns to me.

"If it was Albany Annie," says I, "I should say that a quick grab and a sure one was needed. They don't come any slipperier, I understand. And they say she can use an automatic with the best of 'em."

Cousin Martha shudders. "What a dreadful place to live in!" says she. "Nothing but crime and

criminals and violence wherever you turn. And yet Pinckney wishes me to make this my home."

"No," says Pinckney. "I take it all back. I shouldn't have a moment's peace if you did, for you seem to have a fatal facility for unearthing trouble. I shall be glad if we can get you home before you stir up a riot."

Cousin Martha smiles indulgent. "I'll tell you where I should like to try living for a while," says she.

"Where?" demands Pinckney.

"In some quiet, sleepy little New England village, where nothing at all ever happens," says she. "You know, a very small place. If I could only find one that——"

Here Pinckney gives me the nudge. "Oh, I say, Shorty!" says he. "What about Hickory Hollow?"

"That ought to qualify," says I.

"It isn't a big village, is it?" asks Cousin Martha.

"It's a wide place in the road," says I, "with Ladd's general store on one side, Grange Hall on the other, and the Union Church just beyond. It's up in the Connecticut valley, twelve miles from a railroad and three from Pinckney's country place, Hickory Top."

"And you are sure nothing happens there?" insists Cousin Martha.

"Why," says I, "I believe one corner of the old barrel factory burned down durin' the blizzard of '98, and then two Summers ago—— Let's see, what was the big excitement, then, Pinckney?"

"I think that was when one of Lem. Fickett's cows tried to swallow a turnip," says he.

"That was it," says I. "And aside from them two catastrophes the Hollow has been fairly peaceful. Course, the R. F. D. flivver comes roarin' through once a day."

"I think I should like to see Hickory Hollow," announces Martha.

"Nothing simpler," says Pinckney. "Shorty and I had arranged to drive up tomorrow. You see, I am adding two bathrooms, and the caretaker can't seem to understand from the architect's drawings just where the tubs are to be set. We'll get Mrs. McCabe and Mrs. Bruce to go along and make a week-end party of it. And you shall inspect the Hollow."

So that's what we did. It's only a four-hour run in Pinckney's limousine and we lands at Hickory Top in time for a late luncheon. And by 3:30 we was drivin' down to the village. It sure looks peaceful and quiet enough. Why not, with nothing to do but wait for next Spring?

What people live on in a place like this has always been a mystery to me. I've asked Pinckney, but of course he don't know. And Hi Ladd, who runs the store, he'll only hunch his shoulders. Yet here are forty or fifty houses, with as many families, I suppose, scattered around. Nice, neat painted houses, some of 'em, too; others not so neat. I expect they farm a little, but not enough to hurt themselves. They raise a few potatoes, cut a few tons of hay, have a few hogs and cows and hens. There are

two or three fairly good apple orchards. One man has half a dozen hives of bees. But nobody seems to work reg'lar at anything special, and outside of the one clerk in Ladd's and the postmistress I can't see where a pay envelope is distributed from one year's end to the other. And Pinckney says when he wants any of the natives to do a day's work he has to beg 'em real humble.

"Here you are," says I, as we swings into the main road. "Here's the Hollow on a busy Saturday afternoon."

In front of one house a travelin' meat cart had stopped and a trade for two pounds of round steak with a soup bone thrown in was under way. Across the way two tow-headed boys was pickin' up windfalls from under a Baldwin apple tree. Sunnin' himself in front of the next gate was a fat coon hound. Off in a field a man was loadin' corn-stalks on a wagon. On the side piazzas of most of the houses was displayed heaps of pumpkins and squash.

"How restful it would be," says Cousin Martha, "to settle down here for the winter. Could one rent a house, I wonder?"

"I know of at least one that has been shut up, fully furnished, for more than a year," says Pinckney. "Mr. Ladd can tell us."

"Then let us see Mr. Ladd at once," says she.

For a wonder there were two teams and a flivver parked in front of Ladd's store. And inside we finds quite a mob of people, at least six or eight. They was all grouped around the stove in the back,

talking excited as we came in, but the minute they sees strangers they quits.

"I say, Ladd," demands Pinckney, "what's up? Not another cow tragedy, I hope?"

Hi. Ladd hunches his shoulders. "That's what's up," says he, pointin' to the wreck of an iron safe in the corner. "Gang of yeggs blowed it last night. Got away with near $60 in cash and a lot of Liberty bonds. Makes twice in three years they've blowed a safe on me."

Well, we sympathized with Hi. the best we could, at the same time tryin' to keep Cousin Martha from hearin' the news. But she came rubberin' up and had to be told the whole tale.

"Of course," says Pinckney, "that is quite unusual. May not happen again in a life time."

"I should think even a safe burglar would feel ashamed," says Cousin Martha, "to disturb such a perfectly peaceful spot as this. But I presume there'll be nothing of the sort for years now. And can't Mr. Ladd show me some houses?"

Hi. seems a little surprised that the lady should actually want to live in the Hollow when she don't have to, but when she convinces him how that's the big idea of her visit he allows that there's plenty of room.

"There's the Hicks place," says Hi. "Best house in town."

"But what about Jim Hicks?" says Pinckney. "Where is he living now?"

"He ain't livin' at all," says Mr. Ladd. "Not since Tuesday last."

"By Jove!" says Pinckney. "Sudden, wasn't it?"

"Tol'able," says Hi. "Had his head right agin' the muzzle of that old pump-gun of his when he touched 'er off with a stick. Couldn't'a done it much quicker. Had sense enough to go up into the attic, though."

"But why did he do it?" asks Pinckney.

Hi. shakes his head. "Some say he missed the old lady and couldn't git used to livin' alone," says he, "and others say he got to mixin' hard cider and elderberry wine too frequent. I dunno. But there's the house, empty."

"I don't think I should care for that house," says Cousin Martha decided. "We passed a low, squatty one on the way up. It was painted white with green blinds and looked rather attractive. But I suppose that is occupied."

"The Sam Tilley place, I expect," says Hi. "Yes, you might rent that, like as not. Mame Tilley's taken the two youngsters and gone home to her mother, I understand."

"But where is Sam?" asks Pinckney.

"That's kind of a myst'ry," says Hi. "One of the Plunkitt girls knows all about it, I guess. Anyways, she's missin', too. Her and Sam had been pretty thick. That's what started the little muss we had here Monday night, when Mame chased Jen. Plunkitt down the road with a carvin' knife, both of 'em yellin' like mad. Course, we don't know, but it looks like Sam and Jen. had eloped, as you might say."

"I think that is quite enough," says Cousin Martha. "As I understand it, all that has happened in your quiet little village so far this week has been a burglary, a suicide and a domestic scandal?"

"That's about all," says Hi. reflective, "but I expect some of the old women could tell you of more that's stewin', ready to bile over."

"Thank you," says Martha, "but I am not interested. I have changed my mind about wanting a house. Come, Pinckney, for goodness sake, let's go away from here. I believe it's worse than the city."

She hadn't no more'n landed at Hickory Top before she goes to the 'phone, and for the next half hour she's busy on a long distance call. When she joins us at dinner she looks happy and smilin' once more.

"Well, I'm glad to say it's all settled," says she. "I'm sailing next Thursday."

"Not for Algiers?" says Pinckney.

She nods. "I had quite a talk with the French consul in New York," says she, "and he thinks that the desert tribes are almost under control. At least, he can assure me of military protection if I wish to occupy my villa again. And I certainly do. I shall be in it in less than three weeks, and you've no idea how relieved and safe I shall feel."

Pinckney glances at me and shakes his head gloomy. But I notice he chirps up later on. "At least," he confides to me, "I shall no longer feel responsible. A complex such as that would have baffled Freud himself."

"That's the old guy who invented this dope about twisted minds, eh?" says I.

Pinckney says it is. "You should read the book, Shorty," he adds.

"No thanks," says I. "Folks look odd enough to me as it is, without my judgin' 'em accordin' to somebody's mince-pie dream. I might get the idea you had one of them complex things, too."

"Oh, I say now!" says Pinckney, lookin' shocked.

VI

LOOKING ON AT A TIE

IT was a sporty thing to do, I'll say. You gotta hand him that much. Why, I might not have had any better sense than to have told young Bedford Ames I would, right off the bat. As it is, I was there with the cagey play. I starts stallin' him off.

"Thanks, Bedford," says I. "Mighty decent of you, and all that sort of thing; but honest now, you don't want me—really."

He's a quiet spoken young gent, you know; but what he says always comes across straight, right over the middle of the plate. "If I didn't, Shorty, I shouldn't be asking you," says he. "Come, why shouldn't you?"

"That ain't so easy to tell," says I. "But I have a hunch I shouldn't, and I'm playin' the hunch."

Young Mr. Ames smiles and shakes his head. "Too thin, Shorty. You must find a better alibi than that before I let you off."

"Listen, Bedford," says I. "There was a time when I kind of took pride in being one of these I'll-try-anything-once birds. Used to shoot it on all occasions, until finally some smart guy came back at me with: 'How about broiled crow?' And I've

been off that bright little sayin' ever since."

Bedford grins. "But this is hardly a parallel case, Shorty," he goes on.

"Maybe not," says I. "And I'll admit I've let myself in for some odd acts in my day. Once I helped play dentist to a tame elephant with a toothache. Another time I went with a friend to meet a steamer when he'd had word that a chum of his had died abroad and had left a pair of something named Jack and Jill to be shipped to him. His guess was polo ponies, but they turned out to be a pair of six-year-old twins. I've refereed boxin' bouts and umpired ball games. I've served two terms as chairman of the house committee out at our Yacht and Country Club. And once I was judge at a baby show. But up to date I've ducked being an usher at a church weddin'. Say, think it over, Bedford. That would read nice in the accounts next day: 'The ushers were Percy Stuyvesant, Oggie Vandyke, Reginald Twombley—and Professor Shorty McCabe?' Eh? Now, wouldn't it?"

That line of argument don't get anywhere with Bedford at all. He ain't gettin' married, he says, just to make an item for the society column, and he don't give a whoop what the papers print about it, or don't print.

"You know why I'm asking you, Shorty," says he. "If it hadn't been for what you did, Dixie and I might not have—— Well, I'd be a poor prune not to want you in on the wedding, wouldn't I?"

I expect I was tellin' you about Bedford and the

little queen from Kentucky whose Aunt Alicia was so sore on him when he first came to Rockhurst because he'd inherited a chair factory in Vermont and had failed to have his pedigree printed on his callin' cards. And then, when him and Dixie Patten had fallen for each other, Bedford remembers this great-great-grandfather by the name of Ammi Ruhamah, whose monicker he'd promised to wish onto his son, if he ever had one. Which was where he gives me the distress signal and I helps him out by gettin' the facts before Aunt Alicia, includin' the history stuff and a sketch of the family coat-of-arms. Course, Bedford was an easy winner after that, and now it's merely a case of goin' through the Wilt-thou act.

"I think I get your idea, Bedford," says I, "and it sure does you credit. But I'd like to have read into the record here and now that any little thing I might have done towards easin' you two onto the matrimonial chute you were perfectly welcome to in advance. So let's let it ride at that."

"Dixie will be disappointed if you don't accept," says he. "She's counting on you, too."

"That makes it more complicated, then," says I. "She stands pretty high with me, Dixie does. So I'll tell you; I'll have to talk with my friend, Pinckney. and if he thinks I can qualify for the part, I'll let you know."

He ought to be a judge, Pinckney. That's his long suit, church weddin's. I couldn't say how many times he's figured as usher or best man at them affairs, but he's been at it ever since I knew him,

and what he don't know about this hymen business shouldn't be worth writin' down. So when he drifts into the Physical Culture Studio next day I tackles him with the proposition.

"Pinckney," says I, "how about this weddin' usher act? What are the lines?"

"Why," says he, givin' me one of them cut-up glances of his, "I should say that the lines of an usher were cast in pleasant places, if I may quote from a volume that——"

"Ah, ring the gong on that stuff," says I. "I could read what Ham Mabie or Eller Wheeler or Robert Chambers has to say about bridal bees myself. I'm tappin' you for first hand information. What is it that an usher has to do at a weddin'?"

"Well," says Pinckney, "chiefly and principally he ushers the wedding guests into the pews."

"Oh, yes," says I. "Shows 'em where to sit. Sounds simple enough."

"It is too," says Pinckney, "provided he remembers that relatives and near friends of the groom are all to be placed on one side, those of the bride on the other, and doesn't get 'em mixed up. So he must know in advance who's who, for if he mistakes dear old Aunt Martha for a distant second cousin and wedges her in between a former nurse and the chauffeur's wife, he hardly deserves the gold match box which he found under his plate at the groom's farewell dinner."

I begins to scratch my ear at that. "You could make some bad breaks that way, couldn't you?"

says I. "Don't have seat checks or anything like that?"

"Hardly," says Pinckney. "It is something like this: One sees a stout, purple-faced old lady approaching, a little puffy from having forged her way through the crush in the vestibule. One recalls that this is Mrs. Maitland K. Pomeroy, widow of a former business partner of the bride's father, and the one who sent that expensive thing from Tiffany's. So one advances, bows gracefully, turns to get on her left side, extends one's right arm, crooked, and murmurs: 'Ah, Mrs. Pomeroy! May I show you to a seat?' That is, if one doesn't get it twisted on the tongue and ask 'May I sew you to a sheet?' as has been done, you know."

"Say, that would be me," says I. "I'd be sure to sew 'em to a sheet. Anything else an usher does?"

"Why, that's merely the beginning," says Pinckney. "Having placed all the guests in the right pews, or the wrong ones, as the case may be, he usually joins in the bridal procession up the aisle, and groups himself picturesquely somewhere near the altar while the ceremony goes on."

"Huh!" says I. "Right up front, eh?"

"Oh, no one looks at him," says Pinckney, "unless a potted palm tickles him behind the ear and he sneezes. Then, at the proper moment, he offers his arm to a bridesmaid and gets into step for the Recessional. After that all he has to do is to help escort out front-pew guests, tuck 'em into the limousines, and hurry to the house where the reception, if

any, is to take place. And in the course of an hour or so, after he has exercised his immemorial rights of osculation——"

"Eh?" I breaks in. "What's that in low-brow English?"

"He is supposed," says Pinckney, "to kiss the bride and each of the bridesmaids at least once, and if he's enterprising, he may——"

"Check!" says I. "That's enough. I can see where I'd be a poor performer up to that point; but say, when it came to pullin' that De Wolf Hopper stuff, I'd be so pink in the ears I'd look like I was carryin' two port lights. It's all off, Pinckney. I'll send Bedford my regrets right away. I didn't dream there was all that to being a weddin' usher. We live and learn, don't we?"

"Alas!" says Pinckney. "Some of us only live. You see, I have accepted."

"Oh, well," says I, "you're case hardened. You could drift down a line of sweet young things in pink tulle hats and peck 'em on their cheek dimples without workin' up a flush; but as for me—say, let's not talk about it."

And the first thing I did after getting home that evenin' was to locate Bedford Ames. I finds he's one of a dinner party bunch at the Purdy-Pells, so about 9 o'clock I wanders over there and crashes into the smokin' room, where the men are hittin' up their cigars and cigarettes. Among those present is Pinckney, as usual, and that sculptor friend of his, Garry Gale, from Boston. The two of 'em was chattin' with Bedford, but I'm so anxious to

scratch my entry on the usher list that I don't wait to get young Ames off in a corner. And when Garry hears about a church weddin', he pricks up his ears at once.

He's what I'd call a back number cutie-boy, Garry. A chunky, round-faced party, with wavy front hair and big solemn eyes, and an air of having seen all there was worth seeing. Also he can talk this Back Bay Hahvahdese lingo, with no r's and all the broad a's stretched the limit, like he was born in Copley Square, which he almost was. Yet him and me always seem to find each other kind of entertainin' when we get together.

"Quite right of you, Professor," says he, when I've told Bedford he can count me out on the usherin'. "Don't let them lure you into any such hazardous enterprise."

"Oh, I say, Garry!" protests Pinckney. "This is Mr. Ames' show, you know."

"If only it was!" says Garry. "Insidious fallacy. He is merely the helpless groom who has been snared in the loop of Fate, and soon will be struggling in the tangled web of matrimonial conventions."

That gets a chuckle out of Bedford. "I hadn't thought of it in that way, you know," says he. "Rather had a notion I was engineering the affair myself."

"Yes, they do, at first," admits Garry. "Fancy themselves as conquering, compelling males. 'Let us marry,' they urge. I suppose you got that far all by yourself, didn't you?"

Bedford admits, modest, that he did.

"And then," goes on Garry, "I suppose you demanded that it be a church wedding, eh?"

"Why," says Bedford, draggy, "I hardly remember who suggested that detail. Perhaps Miss Patten did, or her aunt. But it's the regular thing to do, isn't it?"

"It is," says Garry. "That's the tragedy of it. The thing is unescapable, no more to be avoided than the dentist's chair or paying one's income tax."

"Do we infer," asks Pinckney, "that you disapprove of church weddings?"

Garry spreads out his chubby palms and shrugs his shoulders. "If they could be conducted sanely, simply, I should say that a religious edifice was an appropriate place for what should be a sacred ceremony," says he. "But when they are staged as barbaric spectacles, when you load them down with the accumulated bad taste of generations—ugh! One shudders at the thought."

Course, by that time I'm gawpin' at him more or less jarred. "Say, Garry," says I, "how do you get that way? You listen like a parlor Bolshevist that's found a soap-box."

But Pinckney only laughs easy. "One may always depend upon Garry to shudder at the established order," says he. "It is the studio mind declaring its pre-eminence over the common herd. But why so bitter at this particular rite, Garry? You haven't been caught in the fowler's snare, and I seem to recall more than one occasion when you have assisted at church weddings yourself. Besides, your

gaudy generalities may be somewhat alarming to Mr. Ames, who is on the verge of matrimony, as one might say."

"To put it plain," I adds, "let's get down to brass tacks. If Bedford is standin' on a trap door or anything, why not slip him the details? Just what's wrong with gettin' married in church?"

Garry finishes his demi-tasse and lights a fresh cigarette. "So far as Mr. Ames is concerned," says he, "it is too late for warnings. Besides, his keener senses are numbed by the sweet folly in his brain. He has been told so often what a lucky man he is that he can believe nothing else. As for Pinckney, he is a worshipper of conventions. He has a rubber-stamp soul. But you, Shorty, have an untrammeled ego; you can see with a fresh eye."

"All right, all right!" says I. "You're a great little describer, even if your words don't make sense. But havin' got that off your chest, quit the fancy footwork and steam in a punch. Why does a church weddin' give you chills down the spine?"

"Simply because it's apt to be such a ghastly affair," says Garry. "And as commonly practiced, it can hardly be otherwise. Look, you, Professor: Two simple-minded, inexperienced young people decide to be married. They set a date, a month off, perhaps two. The invitations go out. The die is cast. They have committed themselves into the hands of capricious Fate. For, once having named the day, there is no changing. Such of the invited guests as choose to come will be there. Probably the church will be packed. The show must go on.

"But just try for yourself sometime what it means to say that at 3 P. M. on the second Tuesday of next month you will be at a certain place, fit and ready and looking your best. You might, and you might not. In the case of other semi-public affairs, custom is not so inflexible. The condemned criminal, for example, may get a stay at the last moment. But if he doesn't, he has no worry as to whether or not he will be on hand. He's sure to be there. And he can depend on the sheriff, too. Neither priest nor turnkey will fail him. He knows that the thing will go off smoothly, without a hitch. Isn't that so?"

"I couldn't deny it," says I. "I've been married oftener'n I've been hanged, by once."

"And now," goes on Garry, "consider a wedding party. You have perhaps a dozen persons whose presence is vitally necessary; the two principals, the minister, the best man, the maid of honor, bridesmaids and ushers. The clock hands point to two minutes of the appointed hour. The organist has begun the prelude. The people in the packed pews whisper and crane their necks to look at the doors. Why? Because they are conscious that a dramatic climax has arrived. They feel the thrill of uncertainty. Will the show go on as scheduled? It is time. The hour is being boomed out on the big bell in the steeple. A minute has gone past, nearly two.

"Can anything have happened to the bride? Has she fainted, perhaps; or can't the modiste get her veil to hang right? Or is it the groom who causes the delay? Buzz-buzz! go the tongues of the gos-

sips. Maybe the best man missed his train. Or the boy from the florist's got lost with the bridal bouquet."

"Say, I'll be hanged if you ain't makin me nervous!" I breaks in. "And look at Bedford. Why, he's ready to paw with his front foot."

"Not as yet," says Bedford. "Go on with the agony, Garry. With an imagination like that you ought to be a life insurance solicitor."

"But I'm not drawing on my imagination in the least," insists Garry. "Any of these tragic things may occur, have occurred. Pinckney, you remember how Billy Dean almost forgot about the wedding license and was scorching back with it when he was arrested for speeding? And it was two hours before he could raise the cash bail, with several hundred people waiting in the church and the bride's mother in hysterics. And how many times, I wonder, have the wedding rings been mislaid, packed in the going-away bags, or left on the car seat? I heard of one groom who was so fearful of making this mistake that he tucked a ring in either toe of his dress shoes, and had to sit down on the altar steps, in full view of everyone, and fish them out.

"All silly tommyrot, of course, but very real tragedies. So are the little ills and ails that come unbidden at such times, listing not who they light on. I've seen a bride with the snuffles who wiped her red-tipped nose between every 'I wilt.' I've seen them limp down the aisle, from a sprained ankle, acquired that very morning. And a groom with a perfectly outrageous boil on his neck.

Couldn't help it, poor things. The spectacle had been arranged. The show must go on."

"You must admit, though, Garry," puts in Pinckney, "that very often nothing of the kind happens; everyone shows up sound and well, and the show, as you call it, does go on."

"Even so," says Garry, "then where are you? We will concede that at three minutes past the whole wedding party has been assembled in front of the church. Let's hope it's not raining. Here they come, dodging from the motor cars under the canopy and past the grinning mob of strangers gathered to catch a glimpse. Word has been passed to the organist, who swings into the opening bars of the Wedding March. The procession moves. Anything joyous about it, or impressive, or even dignified? Try keeping step to the Wedding March, either of them, without doing a kind of top-heavy sway, complicated by spavin and in-growing toenails. Tum-tum-te-tum! In the usual slow time. March, eh? For a bow-legged sailor, staggering back to his ship after forty-eight hours of shore leave unwisely spent. But not a tune that normal human beings should be asked to march to. Oh, if you can hold one foot in the air during two beats and still keep moving, you can hold the rhythm. But not otherwise.

"Yet there they go; ushers, pretty bridesmaids, flower girl, and the blushing bride on the arm of a bewildered parent who is trying to look solemn and fatherly, but is filled with a vague protest at being dragged into this silly woman's affair; all tum-

tum-te-tuming as best they can, and being quite as graceful and stately about it as if walking over a ploughed field in the dark.

"Somehow or other, though, they arrive; and if they have luck, they group themselves without upsetting any of the potted ferns. The minister begins. The rings are produced. The 'Who giveth' question is asked, and as the bewildered father retires, let us watch to see if he trips on daughter's train. No, he hops over it, which causes a fat girl in an aisle seat to snicker. All is well. That is, unless the anxious groom, who has been coached not to mumble his responses, goes to the other extreme and makes a college yell out of his 'I wilt's.'

"So there you have it; the whole bizarre performance, built up and elaborated by early Victorian females, abetted by a gown-wearing clergy, and handed on down to us with few changes. And yet we think that the Cingalese, who roll a perforated brass ball before the bridal party and wear flower chains around their necks, are a curious and benighted people. Bah!"

"Gee!" says I, breathin' deep, "I'm glad Mrs. McCabe ain't a widow. How do you feel about it now, Bedford?"

"Why," says he, grinnin' brave, "I guess if Dixie can go through with it, I can. But suppose you wanted to marry someone, Garry, how would you do it?"

"Ah, I expect he'd hire a bank vault," says I, "and pull it off at midnight."

"No," says Garry. "I presume I should set my

teeth and do just as you're going to do next Wednesday."

"Anyway," says I, "you've thrown a scare into me, all right. No usherin' in mine, Bedford. I'll be sittin' in a back seat grippin a bottle of smellin' salts."

Course, it didn't work out just that way. As it was, I come mighty near not gettin' there at all. At the start everything looked fine, both Miss Patten and Bedford havin' escaped accidents, arrest and the whoopin' cough. Also it was a swell day and everything sittin' pretty. Pinckney had asked me to stick around at the hotel where Bedford was staying and see that the happy pair's suit cases was stowed in their tourin' car without being tampered with by any confetti comedians. I was right on the job, too, and it was about time for Bedford to get under way, when this Jimmy Langdon, his best man, comes rushin' in, excited, with a kit bag in one hand.

"For the love of soup, Bedford," he gasps, "will you look what I've done!"

"Eh?" says Bedford, grinnin' nervous at him.

"Left my blinkety-blinked frock coat at home!" announces Jimmy, starin' simple. "Thought I'd packed it in the bag. Remember having it in my hand, but just then I must have called up the florist, to see if he'd attended to everything, and left it out. Silly thing to do. And here I am, with nothing but this brown checked jacket to go with the wedding trousers and waistcoat. Look nice, wouldn't it? Can't be done. No. Gotta have a frock coat.

Where? Inside of three minutes. Oh, what a bone-head!"

"Vain regrets," says Pinckney. "Frock coats aren't so rare. Whole city full of 'em. Shorty, get Mr. Langdon a frock coat, will you?"

"Sure!" says I.

Not that I'd located one, or thought I could. But it was the right thing to say. I dashes out into the corridor and just by luck a bell-hop was goin'. He had red hair, too, which is a good sign.

"Hey, boy!" says I, grabbin' him by the arm. "Get me a frock coat, medium size."

"Eh?" says he, starin' at me. "Wh—when, sir?"

"Right away," says I. "Give you two minutes. And here. Shoot that on the spotted bones tonight." And I slips him a five.

"Yes, sir," says he, tuckin' it away.

Would you believe it, he's back within the time limit, breathless but a winner. He hands over a perfectly good frock coat. Looks to be about the right size, too.

"Not that I'm curious," says I, "but what guest did you rob, son?"

"Ah, I ain't takin' that chance for a five," says he. "It's one I rented off'n the pastry cook for two bucks."

I didn't tell that part when I produced the coat and helped the best man on with it, and he had no time to ask fool questions. But he was there in time to tum-te-tum down the aisle with the rest.

"Wasn't it a perfectly charming wedding?" says

Mrs. McCabe on the way home. "And not a single hitch anywhere."

"Uh-huh!" says I. "Thanks to the pastry cook."

And I expect she still thinks I was talkin' about the lady fingers served with the ice cream.

VII

SULLY PLAYS A HUNCH

CHIEFLY this was little Sully's affair. How it would have turned out if I hadn't happened to be home that Saturday afternoon I ain't tried to figure, but I expect he'd have come through somehow. Not just because he's Sullivan McCabe. Not altogether, although I will admit that helps some. But being a 'leven-year-old himself, and the other youngster about that age, too, they seemed to sort of understand each other, right off the reel, in spite of their different bringin' up and all the rest of it.

As Pinckney puts it, after hearin' the tale: "Ah, yes, Shorty; another instance where youth speaks to youth while added years stand dumbly by."

"Ah, patootie-ootie!" says I. "Didn't I do most of the talkin' myself? Course, though, it was Sully who did the sizin' up."

Yet at the start he was the one who was most puzzled. In fact, I don't know when I've seen little Sully with his brow furrowed up so deep as when he comes to me with this report of a boy out at the front gates who wants to swap some jewelry for a gallon of something or other, he can't quite make out what.

"Jewelry, eh?" says I. "That listens suspicious, son. What kind of jewelry?"

"One of them things like Ma wears on her neck for dinner parties. You know," says Sully.

"String of pearls?" says I.

"No, not them," says Sully. "The flat one that hangs down, with the blue in the middle."

"Oh! A turquoise lavalliere, eh?" says I.

Sully nods. "Only this one's different—big and sparkly, with tinny stuff all 'round," says he.

"You're a great little describer, Sully," says I. "But what is it you say he wants to trade this tin jewelry for?"

"He don't wanna trade," corrects Sully. "Wants to leave it until he can come with the money to pay for a gallon of—well, the way he says it, it sounds like sonce."

"Sonce?" says I. "I don't get you at all. Maybe you'd better try at the drug store down in the village."

"Aw, Pop!" protests Sully. "He's all right, 'cept he says things funny. And he wants to get away before somebody comes along that he don't wanna see."

"Well, well!" says I. "Sounds interesting. A kid with fake jewelry who's dodgin' somebody. And you're sure he's quite all right, eh? How did he get here, anyway?"

"Aw, he's in one of them red-bug things," says Sully. "You know, with the little motor wheel behind. You might come take a look, Pop."

"Oh, very well," says I. "But if I get bunked, remember it was you got me into this."

And I will say that this youngster in the khaki ridin' breeches and the leather coat ain't just the specimen I expected to find. He's a bit taller than Sully, but not so solid built. And where Sully's hair is red and wavy his is shiny, black and straight. He has big, black eyes, too. Nothing shifty about 'em, either. Also he's a convincin' talker, if you don't notice what he's sayin' particular. I finds him standin' by this little gas go-cart effect of his, glancin' anxious down the road.

"Well, son," says I, "so you want a gallon of something, do you?"

"If you please, sir," says he, touchin' his cap polite.

And hanged if I could get it any nearer than Sully. It sure sounded like "sonce."

"I don't follow you," says I. "But maybe we can solve the mystery. What do you want it for?"

"Why, for the motor, sir," says he, tappin' the little tank on the rear of the red-bug.

"Oh! You mean gasoline, eh?" says I.

"That's it, sir," says he. "Essence is the French, isn't it? I'm always getting those two words mixed."

"You're French, eh?" says I.

"No, sir," says he, "not exactly."

That got me starin' at him curious. "As a general thing," says I, "people are one thing or another. Course, there's cases. Where do you come from?"

"Just now, sir; or before?" says he.

"We'll put it simpler than that," says I. "Where were you born?"

"Oh!" says he. "In Condor's Nest."

"That's a tank station I never heard of," says I. "Is it in Maine, or Missouri; east or west?"

"I—I don't know, sir," says he. "It's up—up in the clouds."

"Oh, quite so, of course!" says I, glancin' at him sharp. I'm being kidded all right, but he's doing it skillful, with not so much as a cut-up flicker showin' in them big serious eyes. "Well," I goes on, "we'll let it ride at that. You were born high if not high born. Maybe you could tell us your name, though."

He drops his chin at that. "I think I'd rather not, sir," says he.

"Suit yourself, son," says I, "but that listens bad. As a rule we don't have much to do with these John Doe parties," and I starts to leave.

"I'll tell," he announces prompt. "I hope you'll believe me though, when I do. Sometimes they just laugh."

"I'll do my best," says I. "Shoot."

"It's Hey-soo," says he.

"Eh?" says I, gawpin'. "Don't sound like any monicker I ever heard of before. Hey-soo? Kind of a nickname, is it?"

He says it ain't.

"Spell it, then," says I.

Which he does. "Hay-ay-s-oo-s," is his version.

"You must have a new alphabet, son," says I.

"Mine ain't got any letters like 'hay'- and 'o-o' in it. Suppose you write it out," and I hands him an envelope and a fountain pen.

Sure, he would write it. And I gets the shock of my life when I reads what he's printed out. So brace yourself. What he's put down as his name is nothing less than J-e-s-u-s. And I expect I must have showed plain how jarred I was.

"There!" says the youngster. "I was afraid you wouldn't believe me. But that's my first name. The rest is——"

"Never mind any more," I breaks in. "That's about all I can stand at one dose. If you don't mind we'll skip the rest and get to the jewelry Sully says you want to pledge for a gallon of gas. Let's have a look at this North Attleboro stuff."

So Heysoo—I'll spell it that way if you don't object—he digs into an inside pocket under the leather coat and produces what Sully calls a sparkly thing with tinny stuff all 'round. And what he hands over gets another gasp out of me. While I'm no gem expert I can tell a he-sized opal when I sees one. And this sure was a buster. Sparkly! Why, it's a whole bunch of fireworks, a half dozen sunsets frozen together, with a comet or so sprinkled in. Around the edge is a row of diamonds, maybe a dozen, blue white and matched perfect. The tinny stuff is a platinum setting, with a chain of the same. I couldn't begin to guess what the thing was worth —a small fortune, anyway.

I gives Heysoo the up and down suspicious. "I

expect this is something you found in a prize package, eh?'' says I.

''No, sir,'' says he. ''I borrowed it from the drawer of mother's dressing table to—to——'' and there he stops to bite his upper lip.

''I think I get you,'' says I. ''Borrow is the French word, eh? Pretty good at French, ain't you?''

''Not so good as I should be, sir,'' says he, changin' to another subject sort of relieved. ''I am studying it hard, though, so I can talk to my father when he comes.''

''Of course,'' says I. ''You and daddy don't talk the same language, you having been born up in the air and him—I expect he's French, eh?''

''No, sir,'' says Heysoo. ''He talks French, though.''

''Naturally,'' says I. ''Not being French, he would. Nice of you to make it so clear about yourself and your folks. Almost like knowin' 'em. But let's get back to the jewelry. You must want to get rid of this bad.''

''Only for a day or so, sir,'' says he. ''Until I can come back for it.''

''Exactly,'' says I. ''Don't want it to be found on you when—let's see, there's somebody trailin' along after you that you'd just as soon not meet, isn't there?''

''M. Flavelle,'' says Heysoo. ''He's my French tutor. But if I could get the essence—the gasoline, I mean—I could get away before——''

"Nothing doing, son," says I. "Sorry, but I can't help you out in a cute little scheme like this."

"Aw, Pop!" protests Sully. "What's a gallon of gas?"

"In this case," says I, "it's compoundin' a felony. Maybe neither of you knows just what that is, but——"

About then a truck that was passin' slows up and off jumps this narrow-eyed gent with the cheese pie complexion and the zippy black mustache.

"Flavelle!" says Heysoo, shruggin' his shoulders.

He's a smooth, easy talkin' party, Mr. Flavelle. He comes up to us smilin' and showin' his white teeth. "Ah, mon mauvais enfant!" says he. "You play the hide and seek with me, eh? But I find you. Now we shall go back. Come."

"No," says Heysoo. "I—I'm staying with these people for awhile."

"But no," says Flavelle. "You should come with me. Is it not so, Monsieur?" and he turns to me.

"That's my idea," says I. "And the sooner the better."

"Ah! You hear?" says Flavelle, showin' his teeth to Heysoo.

But Sully is pullin' at my sleeve excited. "Listen, Pop," he's whisperin'. "He's no good, this guy. And Heysoo, he's all right. Let him stay and give the other one the run. Go on."

Course, I expect my play then was to send Sully off to the house and advise him stern to let me handle the affair my own way. But somehow I've never trained Sully that way. My mistake, maybe,

but whenever I've seen that he really had different views from mine on a subject, he's always had a chance to state 'em. We've run on them lines ever since he was a little chap. He'd try to show me and then I'd try to show him, and if I did have to decide against him it would only be after the evidence was all in. Takes a little time, but it leaves 'em more satisfied. And now and then he's won his case. So here I calls for particulars.

"What makes you think he's all right, Sully?" says I.

"Well, I can tell by—by his eyes," says Sully.

"Huh!" says I. Then I turns to Mr. Flavelle. "Excuse the private confab," says I, "but the youngster here don't agree with us. He's strong for chuckin' you out and lettin' young Heysoo stay."

Flavelle hunches his shoulders and spreads out his hands. "He is very wise boy, eh?" says he, sneerin'.

"Oh, most of us think we can pull the Solomon stuff," says I. "It won't do any harm for me to state the case, though. You see, Sully, it's like this: Here we have this strange kid show up askin' for a gallon of what he calls sonce. That gets us curious and we ask him where he comes from. He says 'up in the clouds.' He admits he ain't French, but he's learnin' to talk it so he can converse with his father, who ain't French, either. And when I press him for a name—well, you heard. I don't know how you dope him out, but my guess is that your young friend is about as free and fancy a liar as I ever met. He's got Ananias pushed through the ropes.

"If that was all we might smile and pass it up. But that's just the beginning. He's got jewelry in his pocket that's worth more'n this house and lot. Says he borrowed it off'm his mother's dressin' table and wants us to take care of it until he can shake off somebody who's chasin' him. All of which strikes me as crooked. Then here comes Mr. Flavelle, his French teacher, to take him back home. Looks bad, Sully."

Sully is scratchin' his head. All of a sudden he marches up to young Heysoo and looks him square in the eye. "Say, did you mean to swipe the stuff off your Ma?" he demands.

"No," says Heysoo, with his chin up and his eyes steady.

"Criss-cross?" says Sully.

Heysoo goes through the motion.

"Wotcha got it for? Tell that," insists Sully.

"Why," says Heysoo, "so M. Flavelle could show it to his sister."

"Eh?" says I, swingin' on Flavelle. "What about that?"

He shakes his head emphatic. "I do not even know that he has it," says he. "I am much surprised."

"I hadn't noticed that," says I.

"What was he chasin' Heysoo for if he didn't know he had it?" puts in Sully.

"Good point," says I. "Well, Flavelle, your turn."

"When a boy runs from home," says he, "someone must bring him back. So I come."

"O-o-o-oh, what a whopper!" says Heysoo. "Why he came in the little car with me—said if I'd take the jewel so his sister could see he'd let me cut the French lesson. And then when we didn't find his sister for so long, and he kept telling me to go on further, and wanted me to hand it over to him—well, I got scared of him. I said I had to have a drink of soda and while he was in a drug store getting it I drove on as fast as I could until I ran out of gas."

"There!" says Sully.

"Yes, I know, son," says I. "Sounds kind of convincin'. But his record for handin' out the truth and nothin' but the truth ain't good. How about this tale, Flavelle?"

Up come his shoulders eloquent. "As you may know," says he, "it is all what you call bunk. I have not ride in the little car at all—never."

At that Sully grabs me by the sleeve and begins whisperin' indignant. "Make him show his heels. Pop," he demands.

"Eh?" says I. "Show what?"

"His rubber heels—on his shoes," says Sully.

"Lift up your right foot, Flavelle," says I.

"But—but this is foolish," he protests.

"Maybe," says I, "but you better do it." And he displays reluctant a rubber heel that has a clover-leaf design on it.

"Now look at the foot-board on the car, Pop," says Sully. "See?"

Sure enough, there on the varnished wood is a dusty design of a clover leaf—two or three of 'em,

where his heels have been braced. I points it out to Flavelle and gives him the cold eye.

"So you can hand out a little bunk yourself, can't you?" says I. "What's the idea?"

That was where he turned haughty and demands indignant that the boy come with him. "What is he to you?" says Mr. Flavelle. "As for me, I have the right. I am of the family. If you shall interfere——"

"Well, what then?" says I, gettin' a little warm under the collar.

"I must go to the officer of the police," says Flavelle.

"What do you say, Sully?" says I. "Shall we stick by your friend and run the risk, or turn him over to Frenchy?"

Sully ain't long decidin'. He takes Heysoo by one hand and pulls him over on our side, back of me.

"Go to it, Flavelle," says I. "We'll take a chance. But, meanwhile I'm goin' to try callin' up the youngster's mother, and if you care to stick around until——"

"Bah!" says Flavelle, and goes off mutterin'.

"Thank you, sir," says Heysoo, steppin' up manly and shakin' hands. "I am glad he has gone."

"And you ain't afraid of what he'll tell mother?" I asks.

Heysoo says he ain't. In fact, what he wants most is to get back home and tell her all about it himself, includin' the borrowed jewel and Flavelle's sister. "Do you know," says he, "I don't believe

there was any sister waiting. He had never said anything before about having a sister. Perhaps mother will know, though."

As it didn't seem just right to turn him loose by himself, with Flavelle still hangin' 'round, I gets out the roadster and we all three piles in, havin' run the little red bug into our garage to be collected later. And it turns out that where Heysoo lives is on the old Pintard place, which is a whale of an estate up in the hills back of Portchester. It's a run of a dozen miles or so and by the time we swings in between the big stone gates Sully and Heysoo has got pretty well acquainted.

"You come some Saturday and stay over until Monday morning," I hears Heysoo tellin' him. "We'll have lots of fun—tennis, or skating, if the lake is frozen, and then bathing in the salt water pool."

"Eh?" says I. "Salt water up here, a dozen miles from the Sound?"

"Oh, yes, sir," says he.

So I has one more item to add to the list of queer tales Heysoo has sprung on us. We begins to get things straightened out as soon as Heysoo is handed over to mother. She's kind of a dashing looker, but sort of odd and foreign. Also she's mighty glad to see the boy again.

"We could find you nowhere," says she. "And then when we discovered that Mr. Flavelle had disappeared, with all his luggage, we knew not what to think. He sent his trunk away secretly last night."

"Then there wasn't any sister," says Heysoo. "He was after this," and he pulls out the jewelry.

"What!" gasps mother. "The Boliver opal. The scoundrel! Oh, how much we have to thank you for, sir," and she turns to me.

"Sully's idea mostly," says I. "He spotted this Flavelle party from the first. But there's two or three things I'm still puzzled about. Heysoo's name, for instance. I suppose there's more to it."

"Oh, yes," says she. "It is Jesus Pedro y Castro Tallamancha."

"That's some name," says I. "And he was telling us about being born in the clouds. What about that?"

"Above the clouds," says Mrs. Tallamancha. "At Condor's Nest. That's in Equador, you know; our villa on the mountain."

"I see," says I. "South America, ain't it?"

She nods. "But we have lived in the chateau in Champagne," she goes on, "until the war. Then we came here, to wait. That was five years ago, and my boy has forgotten his Spanish, forgotten his French. Next month, too, his father comes from Paris to take us back. He knows the English but little, so what will he say if his son cannot speak with him? It is odd, is it not?"

"Heysoo," says I, stickin' out my hand, "I take it all back. You were giving it to me straight on every count. I'll even take your word for the salt water pool. Pumped up from the Atlantic, I expect."

"But no," says mother. "One must put in the

salt, tons of it. Quite extravagant, but it was so arranged by the former owner."

"Huh!" says I. "He must have owned a gold mine somewhere."

"I do not know," says Mrs. Tallamancha. "They are good to have, gold mines. In Equador we have three."

I didn't have much more to say after that. Somehow I was short of breath and I expect my eyes were bulged out. And when they fixes up a week-end visit from Sully for next Saturday I only nods.

On the way back I squares myself with the son and heir. "Sully," says I, "you had the right hunch that time, even if Heysoo did feed us some tough ones."

"Aw, I could tell by his eyes," says Sully.

"You're a good judge of eyes, I'll say," says I.

VIII

SEEING THINGS WITH SIS

THEY drift through the Studio door on some odd errands, as maybe I've hinted before, and because I can now and then size 'em up at first glance somewhere near accurate I'm always kiddin' myself I'm a wizard at this seventh son stuff. But as this is one of my lucid moments I'll let you in on the true dope. I ain't anything such. Absolutely not.

If I was I wouldn't have made such a wild guess on Kenneth. I expect it was the wide eyeglass ribbon trailin' across his fancy vest into an upper pocket and the new pigskin document case under his left arm that gave me what I thought was a wise hunch. Anyway, the minute he trickles into the front office, looks around hesitatin' and then edges over where I have my feet parked on the roll-top and an afternoon edition spread out comfortable, I gives him the back-up signal.

"No, son," says I. "I ain't subscribin' to any atlas of the new map of Europe showin' the location of all the important battlefields of the world's war. You're about the fifth young college hick that's tried to wish that on me this week."

"I—I beg pardon sir," says he, "but I only——"

"Yeauh, I know," I breaks in. "All you want to do is show me a bunch of sample plates, display a line of cloth and half-leather dummy bindings, and feed me a forty-five minute speel on why every intelligent citizen should sign on the dotted line. But I ain't contractin' to pay a dollar down and then get weekly visits from collectors all the rest of my life. I don't give a hoot where the new republic of Czecho-Slovakia is located, how Poland is bounded on the west, if at all, or what they're fumin' about at Fiume, so if you'll—Eh? Don't tell me that's a bill you're fishin' out, or a subpoena?"

"Oh, no, sir," says he, "but if you are Professor Shorty McCabe, why I——"

"That's me," says I. "What you got there?"

It's just a note from one of my old reg'lars sayin' that this will introduce Kenneth Wales, a nephew of his, who wants to ask a personal favor of me, but that I mustn't let him bother me if I ain't got the time. As it happens I'm just drillin' around waitin' until 7:15 when I'm to join Sadie at the Purdy-Pells for one of their stiff-necked dinners. That ain't the worst of it, either. Sadie don't know I'm wise, but Pinckney has tipped me off that afterward the Purdy-Pells are goin' to spring a young lady vocalist on us, one of these freak warblers who goes out for altitude and hopes to break into grand opera in spite of the high visibility of her collar bones. And Gosh! How I dread them seances.

Also this young chap is a fair-haired, pink-and-

white cheeked party with serious eyes and kind of a pleasant smile.

"All right, Kenneth," says I, still eyein' the leather case a little suspicious. "Shoot."

"You see, sir," says he, easin' himself into a chair, "I am writing a play."

"Oh, yes," says I. "And you thought that being only a few blocks from Belasco and the Shuberts' offices I'd know 'em so intimate I could get it put on for you, eh?"

"Not exactly," says he. "It—it isn't quite finished. But in the seventh act——"

"Eh?" says I. "What is this, a Chinese drama? How many acts, all told?"

"Nine, sir, the way I've planned it," says he. "I suppose some of them might be left out, though. But in the seventh act there's a big fight scene in a mining camp, where the hero knocks out a lot of desperadoes—punches 'em, you know—and—I—well, I'm not very well up on that sort of thing, and when I was talking to my uncle about it he suggested that perhaps you would be good enough to tell me if I'd got it right."

"I see," says I. "Never done much sluggin' yourself; eh, Kenneth?"

"Hardly any, sir," says he, his ears pinkin' up, "except for one or two fights I had at prep school, and I didn't come out very well in any of them, at that."

"No, I shouldn't say you would," says I. "But this play of yours, I take it, is kind of a wild west thriller, with Doug. Fairbanks stunts in it, and a

free-for-all mix-up. You've spent some time in a mining camp, have you?"

"Oh, no," says Kenneth. "Except when I was at college I've always lived at—at home."

"Where's home?" I asks.

"Clover Leaf, N. Y.," says he, droppin' his chin foolish. "Silly name, isn't it? Grandfather's idea when he first started the cheese and butter factory. It's our trade mark, you know. I always register from Binghamton, myself, but Clover Leaf is where we really live. That is, we did. I'm a New Yorker now. But Sis and Aunt May are still there."

"Sis?" says I.

"That's Betty, my kid sister," says he. "She's only 19, so after she finished boarding school I insisted that she stay in Clover Leaf, with Aunt May, to run the house. We're all that's left, you see, and as I'm the head of the family now, I have to tell her what's what. Believe me, she needs it, too. You know what girls are?"

"And you've come to New York to write the great American drama, have you?" says I, lookin' him over curious.

"It's rather a joke, isn't it, sir?" says he. "But I'm giving it a try. I can't see why I shouldn't. Anyway, I wasn't going to stick around Clover Leaf and pretend to run the cheese factory. It's such a smelly, messy place. Besides, with Dad's old superintendent on the job, the business runs itself. Print butter and domestic Camembert cheese, you know. We turn out tons of it every month. That's about all I know of the game, or care to. Of course, I

don't set myself up as a dramatist yet. But I did a few skits that took rather well at college and I wanted to see if I couldn't do something bigger."

"Couldn't buy the right kind of ink in Clover Leaf?" I suggests.

"It wasn't that, sir," says Kenneth. "But it's such a dull hole. All you see are rubes and milk cans and village cut-ups. I needed to get into the literary and dramatic atmosphere, if you know what I mean; to be where men were doing big things in a big way, where I could feel that I was really part of it all."

I shakes my head. "That's a little too deep for me," says I. "Just where is all this going on? What's the street number?"

At which Kenneth admits that he ain't actually up against the big stuff yet. He says he's livin' in a boardin' house up on West Fifty-umpt Street. "You know the sort of thing," he goes on. "Rather skimpy meals in a dingy basement dining room, wabbly furniture, and the boarders a vapid lot of bank clerks, lady floor walkers and a few girl art students from the Middle West, with some freaky old women. And the outlook from my two windows is absolutely uninteresting—just rows of flat-house windows, about as inspiring as looking at the side of a barn. But I don't seem to mind. The duller and grubbier people are around me the easier I can picture the real men and women I'm writing about, the clearer I can see that wild free life out in the clean open spaces of the big West. Besides, I'm right here where I can see all the good plays; that

is, the ones that take. Some of them are pretty poor stuff, too, if you ask me. I'm just foolish enough to think I can turn out things almost as good when I get going. Now this 'Rose of Lost River' play which I'm finishing—it ought to go big. Especially the fight scene, if I can get it right. It's about a—— But to understand exactly how it comes in you ought to hear the whole thing. I brought it along and if you don't mind I'll begin at the start and read——"

"Now, just a minute, Kenneth." says I. as he's unbucklin' the pig-skin case.

It wasn't so easy stoppin' him, but by suggestin' that as it's now past 5 o'clock and that maybe after dinner would be a better time, I staved him off. I promised to come around to his room and take the dose there, where we wouldn't be disturbed and could have the whole evenin' for it. Not that I'm strong for being read to by an amateur playsmith, as a rule, but this listened like a good alibi to give Sadie and duck the sing-fest. Also I figured I could shut Kenneth off when I'd got enough, and at the Purdy-Pell's I'd simply have to squirm in my chair and take the gaff.

"Oh, will you come?" says Kenneth, beamin'. "That's bully of you, Professor."

So I had a nice comfortable feed at the chop house, after which I calls up Sadie to break the news. "Sorry, old girl," says I, "but I got an important date. Uh-huh, Kenneth Wales, the big dramatist, wants me to help him work out a fight scene in his new play."

She falls for it, all right. "Why, how nice!" says she.

"Ain't it?" says I. "May be a long session, too, so I'm liable to be home late. You fix it up for me with the Purdy-Pells."

And ten minutes later I'm strollin' along West Fifty-umpt street lookin' for Kenneth's number. It's in one of those old brownstone fronts that was probably some swell uptown mansion back in the days when Dick Croker was Tammany's big chief. There'd been a whole row of 'em. But the fronts of some had been turned into stores—plumbers' shops, hand laundries, real estate offices and the like—and the rest had "Room and Board" signs out, and across the way the apartment houses had crowded in, so the neighborhood was a good deal as Kenneth had described. I don't wonder he finds it dull.

The sloppy-dressed darky girl that let me in says I'll find Mr. Wales in No. 19, third floor front, and I trails up, expectin' to discover Kenneth with a green eye-shade draped over his fair brow and both hands full of manuscript. But as I knocks on the door I hears what sounds like a domestic riot, with a girl's voice supplyin' the bulk of the debate.

"Huh!" thinks I. "Have I got the wrong floor, or what?"

But it's Kenneth himself who swings open the door and as I steps in he waves disgusted at this pert-faced young lady in the zippy little pheasant turban and remarks: "Will you look who's had the nerve to butt in on me, Professor? Sis!"

"Oh, yes," says I. "Pleased to meet you."

"And you can bet I'm pleased to be here," says Sis.

"Well, I'm not pleased," says Kenneth. "And what's more, young lady, you can just trot yourself right back where you came from."

"Gr-r-r!" says Miss Betty, waggin' her head. "Hear him growl, Professor. Doesn't he think he's savage, though? Grows wilder hour by hour. But I don't care. I'm not going to stay shut up in that pokey old town with a deaf aunt who hooks rugs for excitement and thinks I ought to go in for tatting as a career."

"Would you mind telling me, Elizabeth Wales, just what you think you're going to do here?" demands Kenneth.

"Certainly I wouldn't mind, Kenny, dear," says Betty. "I'm going to be private secretary to the most promising young dramatist who ever left Clover Leaf."

"You!" says Kenneth. "A lot of help you'd be."

"But you don't know what I've been doing," says Betty. "Studying to be a typist. M-m-m-m! I've been down to the factory office three afternoons working at it, and I know where nearly all the letters are now. I've bought the darlingest little machine, too, and——"

"Tommyrot!" breaks in Kenneth. "Where do you think you would live?"

"Why, right here, Kenny," says she. "I've rented the hall bedroom, just next to yours on this floor. And it's going to be such fun, being right in

New York, with everything going on and so much to see."

"Now isn't that just like a fool girl?" demands Kenneth of me. "Don't you know, Betty, that New York is no place for a simple young thing like you to live in? And as for seeing things—well, I guess you haven't looked out of the windows."

"Just a glimpse or two," says Betty, "and it's perfectly fascinating—all those people across the way. I could watch them for days and days."

"Well, you're not going to," says Kenneth, decided. "You're going to start for home first thing in the morning."

"Sha'n't!" says Betty, runnin' out her tongue.

"Don't be vulgar," says Kenneth. "And anyway, I haven't time to settle your case now. Professor McCabe has come to help me with my play."

"Oh, how exciting!" says Betty. "I want to hear it."

"It isn't a play for young females to hear," says Kenneth, "and I'm not going to have you listening and interrupting. Go to your hall bedroom until we're through."

"Oh, Kenneth! Don't be a beast," she protests. "If you've written something so awful that you can't read it before your own sister I'm ashamed of you. But I won't listen. Let me stay and I'll sit quietly there by the window and take in all the sights."

"Sights! Humph!" says Kenneth. "Very well. But not a word, mind you. I hope you don't mind her being here, Professor?"

"I'll try to stand it," says I, grinnin' at Sis.

Say, they had me interested, these two. I can't say as much for the first twenty or thirty pages of "Rose of Lost River." I expect it all meant something or other, but hearing it read that way I couldn't seem to get the different characters untangled or sense what it's all about. But just as I'm gettin' fidgety there comes an outbreak from Sis.

"Oh, I simply can't stand it any longer without asking what on earth those people across the way are doing," says she.

"Eh? What people?" demands Kenneth.

"Why, there on the fourth floor, where the shades are up," says she. "Come here a moment, both of you. Now see! there's a woman in some sort of a black dressing gown who is sitting back to us. And across the little table from her is a very stout woman with her hair down. They're playing some sort of a card game, I think, but I can't make out what it can be. See! The thin one's dealing now. And after they sort their cards they throw some of them down and deal others, and then they pick something from the table corner and push it into the middle. They've been sitting there for hours and hours, ever since I first came. And the thin one is smoking cigarettes——"

"Now didn't I tell you, Betty?" says Kenneth. "New York is no place for an innocent young thing such as you. Come away from that window."

"Pooh!" says Betty. "I'm not such a greeny as you think. I've smoked cigarettes myself; three

of 'em, at boarding school. And I've played rummy. But I can't think what that game is. Can you tell me, Professor?"

"I should say it might be stud poker," says I.

"How thrilling!" says Betty. "But I didn't know ladies played that; at least, not for hours and hours."

"Depends some on what kind of ladies they are," says I.

"Oh, come!" says Kenneth. "Let's get back to the fifth act. And for Heaven's sake, Sis, watch some other windows."

Sis seems willin' enough and it's all of ten minutes before she breaks loose again.

"Please," says she, "but there's the funniest old man on the third floor who is doing the oddest things."

"Oh, shut up, Sis," says Kenneth.

"But he is," she insists. "He brings out a square box-thing with a handle in the top and a black cloth over it and sets it in a chair. Then he leans over it and talks to it. I can see his lips move. And pretty soon he takes that away and brings out another just like it and goes through the same performance."

"How absurd!" says Kenneth. "Talking into a box! I don't believe it."

"Then just you come and watch, smarty," says Betty. "There! He's fetching a new one. See?"

It's a fact. He's a dignified lookin' gray-haired old boy, too, but his motions sure are batty.

"What can he be doing, Professor?" asks Betty.

"It's by me," says I.

"Oh, I wish I knew," says she.

"Well, you can't," says Kenneth crisp. "Besides we're busy and you promised not to interrupt. Now quit it or you'll have to go to your room."

"I'll be good," says Betty, turnin' again to the window.

We'd got well into the sluggin' scene of the big seventh act when she crashes in once more. "O-o-o-oh, Kenny! Professor!" she calls excited.

"Darn!" says Kenneth, throwin' down his manuscript. "What now?"

"The street is full of sheep," she announces.

"Sheep?" says he, lookin' at me inquirin'. "Why, they don't have sheep in New York, do they?"

"Never saw any except in Central Park," says I.

"But they're here, hundreds of them," says Betty. "I'll open the window and you can hear them bleat."

Sure enough, we could. And believe me, it sounds weird. Baa-baa! You know that trembly double note they make, risin' and fallin', like they was callin' and answerin' one another? But when you get hundreds of 'em at it at the same time it's quite a chorus. We could hear it plain above the roar of the traffic. So once more we goes to the window. It's about as odd a sight as I've seen in New York, too. They was packed in thick, from curb to curb, some even stragglin' up on the sidewalk. Leadin' the flock is a man with a lantern and behind, half way down the block, comes a covered dray bringin' up the rear.

"But what are they doing here? Where are they going?" Betty wants to know.

"That's another conundrum I give up," says I.

"Oh, I think this is the most interesting street!" says Betty. "It's as good as watching a play. Really! Don't you think it is, Professor?"

"It hadn't struck me that way before," says I, "but with your eyes pickin' out the excitin' events. I don't know but what it is."

"Well, I've been living right here for over three months," says Kenneth, "and I'm sure I haven't been thrilled by anything I've seen or——"

Whatever else he was going to add is drowned out by a series of screams that comes from the sidewalk almost under us. It's the real high tragedy stuff, shrill and squawky, such as only the female voice can put over when registerin' violent emotion. Course we all has to rush to the window again and stretch our necks out. Two doors west of us and down in an area we can make out a man and a woman millin' around lively. She seems to be sailin' into him tooth and nail and between squawks she's callin' him a lot of impolite names. Men and boys are runnin' towards 'em from every quarter and all along the block windows are goin' up, while the janitor from the apartments across the way has stepped out in the middle of the street and is blowin' a police whistle frantic.

"Oh, oh! Isn't it awful?" says Betty, jumpin' up and down panicky, but not missin' a move of what's goin' on.

Which is where Kenneth decides to do a little

strong-arm work himself. "Now you come right away from that window, Sis," says he. "Oh, yes, you will, too. This minute." And he grabs her by the shoulders.

"Yeow!" yells Betty, strugglin' to get loose. "Don't you dare touch me, Kenneth. Don't you dare. I want to see what's going to——"

"You've seen quite enough for one evening, young lady," says Kenneth. "Along with you. No scratching now. You will, eh? I'll fix you for that."

Betty remarks "Yeow" several times, but big brother drags her across the room, pushes her into a closet and locks the door.

"There!" says he. "Now I guess you'll be good."

"Beast!" says Betty, sort of muffled and sobby. "Please, Professor, tell me what's happening down there."

"Maybe Kenneth won't mind when it's all over," says I.

But it's like so many of them street mix-ups that don't seem to begin anywhere or come to any particular finish. A crowd collects that includes everybody in the neighborhood except a cop; the argument gets wilder and more menacin'; and all of a sudden the man makes a break, dashes down the street and dives into a doorway. Pretty soon the woman trails off in the other direction, the spectators try to tell each other what it was all about, and inside of five minutes there's nobody left but a

couple of boys and the officious janitor who has pocketed his police whistle.

"You may come out now," says Kenneth, "if you'll go to your room and get into bed."

"But I can't sleep, so what's the use!" says Betty, emergin' from the closet with her hair mussed. "I want to know about all these things—the man talking into the box, what the sheep were doing here, and why that woman screamed. Can't anyone tell me? I must know."

"Listen to that, will you!" sighs Kenneth. "As though one could explain all the sights and sounds of New York!"

"But these are real mysteries," persists Betty. "It's tantalizing, like reading only the first chapters of continued stories and then leaving off. I should think you might find out something, or that Professor McCabe could——"

"I'll try, Miss," says I. "And I'll admit being a bit curious about some items myself. That janitor across the way looks like he was ready to spill information if he was tackled right."

It was a good guess. He's one of these important, liver-colored New York darkies with a loose tongue, and after I've slipped him a half he recognizes me for a party he can confide in ad lib. And inside of 15 minutes I'm back in the third floor front with an earful.

"Well?" demands Betty. "First about the old gentleman talking into the boxes?"

"They wasn't boxes at all," says I. "Bird cages."

"Oh, I say!" protests Kenneth.

"Do be quiet," says Betty. "Go on, Professor. Why does he talk into bird cages?"

"Because he has young parrots in 'em," says I. "That's the way he teaches 'em to talk; says things over and over while they're covered up at night. He's a parrot professor. See? Buys 'em up cheap when they're young and then when they've acquired a repertoire he sells 'em for big prices. He was at work with the freshman class when we saw him."

"Isn't that odd!" says Betty. "But what about the sheep?"

"Regular thing through this street," says I. "Twice a week they drive 'em from the stock cars over to the East River slaughter houses. Fresh lamb chops for New York, that's all. Only as a rule they go later at night, when the traffic is light."

"How simple!" says Betty. "And I suppose the woman who screamed was just a school teacher or somebody with a case of nerves?"

"No," says I. "The janitor thinks she's a vaudeville actress who has been chucked into the discard by the other half of the sketch and had got loaded up with woe and booze substitutes until she just had to lay for the man in the case and express her feelin's. She had an automatic in her fist, but didn't know how to release all of the safety catches. Otherwise there might have been a real tragedy in the area."

"Only fancy!" says Betty. "And here Kenneth thinks this is a dull street and is writing of places and people he's only read about! I don't care what

he says, I'm going to stay right here for ever so long and watch out of the window every night. So there!"

When I left 'em they'd compromised on her tryin' it for a couple of weeks, providin' she could qualify as a typist.

"You see," says he, "I shall need someone to copy my play, if I can ever get it finished."

"When you do," says I, "you ought to start a new one. You might call it 'A Night on Fifty-umpt Street.' "

IX

GANGWAY FOR SUDIE BELLE

I AIN'T accountin' for Sudie Belle Jenks, or apologizin' for her, or even tryin' to list her in any class. I'm just admittin' that she handed us two jolts, one going and one coming, which I claim is some record for a seventeen-year-old miss from Tuppertown, N. Y.

Maybe you never heard of that classic burg. I expect I wouldn't have either, if it hadn't been for "Sulphur Steve" Jenks. Course, that wasn't the name on the brass plate down in front of his Broad street offices, but I understand it was the one he was best known by among the Stock Exchange crowd. You could easy guess why after you'd heard him express his emotions when he was well stirred up, for he was an easy and fluent cusser.

I ain't givin' you that second handed, either. No, Sulphur Steve had been a reg'lar of mine here at the Physical Culture Studio long enough for me to know most of his little traits as well as some that wasn't quite so well advertised. For instance, where he took his degree in profane language. It was out in the Black Hills drivin' a six-mule supply team over roads that was mainly antelope trails and hadn't been improved any when he met 'em.

So you see Mr. Jenks must have been some old-timer. He was. He told me once he'd put in twenty years followin' new strikes of pay dirt. Not drivin' mules all the time. He graduated from that to a full-blown mining engineer and it wasn't until he was over 50 that he came East to discover that the big money wasn't in stakin' claims out in the wilds, but by openin' offices right here in New York and unloadin' minin' stocks on ambitious investors who wanted to get rich without workin' up any hand callouses. From that he got to be a general operator; gold, silver, copper, anything dug out of the ground except potatoes and carrots; until the youngster who'd run away from home when he was 16 with a total capital of $3.75 and a Johnathan Crook jackknife had come to be one of our prominent plutes, with a ten-room suite at the Perzazzer Hotel, three chins, his favorite table at Del's, and a spotted liver that sent him to Shorty McCabe's for medicine ball treatment about every so often.

First off I used to think he was just a hard boiled old pirate who had a soul like a withered hickory nut and the disposition of a rogue elephant. As for his business ethics and private morals, the less said of them the better. But as we got better acquainted, I got wise to the fact that he wasn't half as bad as he let on to be. I expect I must have said something of the kind once for I remember his gettin' confidential and tellin' me I was more than half right.

"In fact, Shorty," says he, "I am almost a per-

fect and an upright man, such as Job was. Only that side of my life I live vicariously."

"Eh?" says I, gawpin' at him.

"Through my brother, the Hon. Matthew Jenks," says he. "He has done the respectable and the religious for both of us. I insisted on his starting that way, and I've kept him at it. He's not going to lose by it in the end, either. I've fixed all that."

Seems Matthew was a couple of years younger and he was the one the old folks depended on when Steve cleared out. He didn't want to stay, either. But Steve kept writin' back to him how he must, and tellin' what a rough time he was havin', and now and then sendin' him a money order to keep him cheered up. It was Steve who advised him to get a job in the bank, and urged him to join the church, and egged him on to marryin' the girl he used to be sweet on himself. And when Steve made his first big stake almost his next move was to buy enough bank shares so he could put Matthew in as president. And all this without the two ever having seen each other for more'n forty years. But hardly a week went by without Steve writin' to Matt and Matt's writin' to Steve. He had a picture of the Hon. Matthew on his desk, and carried around snap shots of his two nieces, one a young lady well along in the twenties, the other just a kid.

"He's even brought up a family for me, Shorty," says Sulphur Steve to me.

"I should think you'd want to run up there and see him some day?" I suggested once.

"So I would," says Steve, "if I could do it with-

out his seeing me. Besides, he would ask me to say the blessing at dinner. A fine object I'd be, Shorty, asking grace, wouldn't I?"

Yet in his way Stephen T. Jenks wasn't such a bad old scout. Let's see, must have been more'n a year ago that he passed out sudden in a Denver hotel while off on one of his business trips. And for awhile there I kind of missed him showin' up at the Studio Tuesdays and Thursdays. But in a month or so—well, you know how it is. Maybe you remember readin' of all the different things he left his pile to; colleges, homes of various kinds, hospitals, and funds for this and that. He sure scattered it around generous when he let go.

And among the items was one establishin' a trust fund for the benefit of his brother, the Hon. Matthew Jenks. Not such a huge amount, two or three hundred thousand, I believe. He might have made it a million just as easy, but I expect he didn't want to load him down with more'n he'd know how to use. Steve had hinted as much to me once. And for a country banker that would be some windfall.

At the time I wondered what the Hon. Matthew would do when his share was handed over, but of course I had no way of hearing. And then here one day early last fall I came back from lunch to find this kind of oldish, countrified couple waitin' in the front office. If I'd had any hint at all I might have guessed from the gray side whiskers, the black string tie, and the square-topped derby hat, that this was the banker brother from Tuppertown. As it was I took 'em for a couple of strays huntin' for

the Mission Tract Society offices until he asks if I'm Professor McCabe. And when I admits I am he passes out his card and introduces Mrs. Jenks. She's a quiet spoken, shy actin' old girl with a nice pleasant face and a faded complexion. Also she's costumed in a back number black silk dress, and on top of her heavy pile of dark hair that's just beginnin' to streak up with gray is balanced a freaky string bonnet that looks like it had been wished on her at the village milliner's spring mark-down about five seasons back.

"Startin' out on a little tour, eh?" I suggests.

"No," says the Hon. Matthew. "Mother and I are not fond of travel. In fact, this is our first visit to New York in a good many years. We came down to look up a school for our youngest daughter."

"Oh, yes," says I, tryin' to figure out just where I connected with a job of that kind. The Hon. Matthew don't leave me guessin' long, though.

"My dear brother Stephen," he goes on, "had often mentioned you in his letters; in very high terms, if I may say so; and presuming on that friendship we have ventured to consult you in this matter. True, I might have looked up some business acquaintances, but as we understood that you were in some way connected with educational work —er——" and he gazes around at the Studio wall decorations kind of doubtful.

"I get you," says I. "The Professor part had you buffaloed. Well, my line is mainly teachin' puffy parties how to steam in short jabs and train

down by workin' the gym apparatus. No branches at young ladies' boardin' schools. Not as yet."

"Ah, I—I understand," says the Hon. Matthew. "Somewhat stupid of me. Sorry to have troubled you, Professor. We will just have to look them up for ourselves as best we can."

They both looks sort of disappointed, too. I expect that's why I made my rash offer to do what I could to help.

"Thank you," says the Hon. Matthew. "Perhaps you could tell us how to find some of these nearby schools. Mother, you have the catalogues, haven't you? What was the name of that one we thought sounded best?"

At which Mother digs a bunch of booklets out of her shoppin' bag and produced a thick one printed elaborate on ragged edge paper. "It was Hawthorne Hall," says she.

"Why," says I, "that's just up in Connecticut, only twenty miles or so from where I live. Mrs. McCabe knows more or less about that joint. Say, suppose you run out to dinner with us tonight and talk it over with her?"

Well, they protests that it's a good deal to ask of strangers, but when I insists that any brother of Steve Jenks was no stranger to me, and plans to meet 'em at the 5:10 they agrees gratefully. And at dinner that evenin' we come pretty near gettin' the whole life hist'ry of the Jenkses.

It wasn't a thrillin' tale. Fifty odd years in Tuppertown, mostly scrubbin' along on what the Hon. Matt. made as cashier of a little two by four bank.

But they'd managed to buy a neat little cottage; and contribute regular to the church; and send Dorothy, their oldest girl, to the State Normal School so she could be a teacher and help out some. And then when Steve had begun to boost in real earnest and Matthew had been made president of the bank, and been elected mayor of the town, things had started to come their way. And here a year ago they woke up to find themselves rich. They'd built one of the biggest and showiest houses in town, bought a fine new tourin' car, captured two hired girls somewhere, and Dorothy had quit teachin'. It had all come a little late, but they were enjoyin' it, just the same.

"Only we are somewhat worried about Sudie Belle," says Pa Jenks.

"Who's she?" says I.

"She's our baby girl," says he. "Not really, you know. She was seventeen last month, but she still seems a baby to us; doesn't she, Mother? You see, being ten years younger than Dorothy and coming to us when we were almost middle-aged, as you might say, we—we've made a good deal of her. Almost too much, perhaps. And now that we are able to give her so many things, indulge her whims and so on, I fear that she is being a little spoiled. You understand. It is such a pleasure to give her what she wants. Very likely we are not wise in what we do give her.

"And in Tuppertown she is not having the advantages which she might have elsewhere. She's not forming the right kind of acquaintances. Just

the village girls and boys to go around with. Some of them are very nice young people, too, but I suppose they lack—er—certain refinements. So we have decided that it would be selfish and unjust to keep her with us any longer. She ought to go to some good school for young ladies, one of the very best. I am sure Stephen would have wished it. But where to find just the right school——"

"Hawthorne Hall stands very high," puts in Sadie. "Of course, it is rather a fashionable boarding school."

Mother Jenks nods approvin'.

"And it's quite expensive," adds Sadie.

"I should not consider the cost," says the Hon. Matthew.

"Then we'll drive up tomorrow and see Miss Spencer, the principal," says Sadie.

And after one peek at the gorgeous reception rooms of Hawthorne Hall, and a look at the suites with private bath, and discoverin' that the dinin' room was called "the refectory" and the place where the saddle horses were kept was "the mews," the Jenkses decided unanimous that this was the place for Sudie Belle. Also to save 'em another trip down Sadie suggests that if they'll put her on the train I'll meet her, bring her out here for the night, and she'll take her to Hawthorne Hall herself next day. She made a great hit with the Jenkses, Sadie did.

"You are such a dear!" says Mother Jenks.

"Nonsense!" says Sadie. "I'm just fond of having young people around. I shall have Sudie Belle

down here as often as they will allow her to come."

So that's how I happened to be waitin' at the Grand Central for a young miss who was to be carryin' a green silk umbrella and a black leather suit-case with a big red J painted on one end. What I'd framed up in my mind was a perky little dame with village cut-up manners and probably roly-boly eyes. But this shy, overgrown youngster with her hair down her back and her eyes on her toes sure is something of a surprise. I expect the sudden shift from Tuppertown to a regular city had scared her about stiff. Anyway she acts awkward and out of place. She does admit that she's Sudie Belle when I hails her, but that's about all the conversation I was able to drag out of her on the way up. The most she would do was to glance around curious at some of the zippy dressed young ladies in the car and then down at her own plain cut blue serge. Once or twice I caught her tryin' to tuck her thick hair braid out of sight and she snuggled down next to the window as if she was tryin' to hide.

Sadie almost gasps when she inspects her, and later on she gives me her confidential verdict. "She certainly can't go to Hawthorne Hall dressed like that," says she. "I must send a night letter to her mother and get permission to outfit her properly."

She got it, and within a week Sudie Belle had almost blossomed out into a young lady. And in her new clothes she was quite a stunner to look at; that is, she would have been if she'd only held her chin up and quit doin' the scared mouse act.

"I do hope she'll learn something about style, if nothing more," says Sadie, after she's left her at the school.

"Ain't that their long suit at Hawthorne Hall?" says I.

"But Sudie Belle seems so utterly countrified," says Sadie, sighin'.

Somehow she ain't so strong for having her come down for the week-end as often as she'd planned. Besides, she finds that they don't encourage that sort of thing at the school. And from the two or three brief notes Sudie Belle writes back Sadie decides that she must be gettin' along all right. Anyway, she says she's havin' a perfectly corkin' time.

"I'm sure I hope so," says Sadie, and lets it ride at that.

And the first thing we knew the Christmas holidays was almost here and we hadn't seen Sudie Belle once.

"She must stop here for a night on her way home," says Sadie. "Then you can take her in and see that she gets on the right train. I almost dread to see her, though. I know her folks are going to be disappointed in what the school has done for her."

So Sadie drives up to Hawthorne Hall, and when I comes home that night, seein' the wardrobe trunk in the lower hall, I remembers about Sudie Belle.

"Well, what about the young lady?" I asks Sadie.

"H-m-m-m!" says she, springin' that peculiar twisty smile of hers. "I don't know what to say.

She'll be down for dinner soon and you may judge for yourself."

But when this vision in blue tulle with the rhinestone shoulder-straps and hardly anything else above the waistline floats in she had me guessin'. First off I thought maybe some movie star had trickled through the skylight out of an airplane and was goin' to ask the way to the Fort Lee studios. But then I sizes up her general build, and the big dark eyes and decides it must be Sudie Belle. But she's no more like the Sudie Belle I met at the train a little over three months ago than I am like an Easter lily. The thick braid of hair that hung down her back has been done up and marcelled and puffed out over her ears in a style that must have come in only day before yesterday. Also it seems to have a new tint to it. Her complexion is a wonder, only there's a little more of it on the right cheek than on the left, but maybe the black beauty patch was meant to balance that. Altogether she's a good deal of a whiz.

That shy, downcast trick with the eyes seems to have gone into the discard with the blue serge dress and the low-heeled shoes. She looks square at you now and don't hesitate to turn on the full candlepower of her lamps. And she's found her tongue.

"Oh, there you are, Professor, you old dear!" says she, givin' me the rush tackle and grabbin' me by the shoulders.

I think I'd been kissed, too, if I hadn't backed off hastily. "Well, well, Sudie!" says I, starin' at her. "What's the idea? Trainin' for the Follies?"

"You darling old goose!" says she, chuckin' me under the chin. "Isn't he the silly though, Aunt Sadie?"

Oh, yes, Sudie Belle has been goin' some since we saw her last. And it was a lively brand of boardin' school chatter she handed out durin' the meal; mostly about their English riding instructor, "who has just the darlingest mustache," with here and there sketchy little bits about some of the "men" she'd met from the prep. school in the next town. We didn't have to say much. Sudie Belle could do the talking for a whole tableful. I noticed Sadie watchin' her puzzled for some time and then she asked.

"Tell me, child, what have you been doing to your eyebrows?"

"Why, I had them plucked, of course," says Sudie Belle. "They were perfect frights before—too thick. I tried shaving them at first, but I made a mess of it; got off too much and had to use a retouching pencil for weeks. But the last time I was in town I bunked the chaperone and had the plucking done. Next trip I splurged on a permanent wave. Hurts horribly, doesn't it? But it's such a comfort."

"But—but what did Miss Spencer say to you when she saw it?" demands Sadie.

"Oh, she had one of her usual fits," says Sudie Belle, shruggin' her powdered shoulders careless, "but that's all it amounted to. All the other girls are doing it, you know; at least, all those in our bunch."

"Must be some torrid bunch," says I, but not too loud.

And before we doused the light that night Sadie and me had a confab over what was to be done.

"We simply can't send her home like that," says Sadie, "without any explanation or warning."

"That's so," says I. "Pa and Ma Jenks would get a jolt handed 'em. Why, she's almost a vamp."

"And there's no telling how she would behave alone on the train," adds Sadie. "She would have half the men turning their heads after her. Shorty, you'll just have to take her up, that's all, and tell them we were in no way responsible."

"Ah, come!" says I. "Me land in Tuppertown with that?"

Uh-huh! That was the decision. And while the street costume she appeared in wasn't quite so zippy as her dinner dress her get-up was smart enough so that we left a trail of stretched necks wherever we went. Seventeen! Why, she might have been in the twenties for all anybody could tell. The nearer we got to Tuppertown, too, the chillier I got below the ankles.

"See here, Miss," says I as we pulled into the station, "what do you expect your ma's going to say when she sees you?"

"Mother? Oh, pooh!" says Sudie Belle. "That'll be all right, all right."

I was glad we hadn't wired ahead so they could take the shock at home and not in public. It was some gasp Mother let out, too, when she got her first

glimpse. As for the Hon. Matthew, he gazes at her sort of stunned. But Sister Dorothy is the one who comes right out with what she thinks.

"Why, Sudie Belle Jenks!" says she. "Whatever have you been doing to yourself?"

"What do you think, Dorry dear?" says Sudie Belle. "I've been catching up. Don't you like the effect?"

"No," says Dorothy decided. "You—you look like an actress. Mother, I think you ought to make her go up and wash that paint off her face at once."

"Paint?" says Ma Jenks. "Now, Dorothy!"

She ain't such a bad lookin' girl, Sister Dorothy, only kind of old maidish and dowdy dressed. And for all she lets on to be shocked so much she can't seem to keep her eyes off Sudie Belle. While I'm tryin' to think of the right thing to say the two girls sort of makes it up and the next thing I know they've disappeared upstairs together. I was still stallin' around, half an hour or so later, when they comes back.

"Why, Dorothy!" exclaims Mother.

It's another mild case of transformation. She's had her hair puffed over her ears, and her lips touched up, and a drug store blush added to her cheeks, and hanged if she don't look almost as fresh and stunnin' as Sudie Belle herself.

"She just coaxed and teased until I let her do it," says Dorothy. "I suppose I'm a sight."

"You're not a frumpy old maid any more, at least," says Sudie Belle. "And in two or three days I'll have you fixed up so that on-and-off beau

of yours, Billy Barnes, will either have to make up his mind whether he wants to marry you or not, or else he'll find himself standing in line. So there!"

"I must say," admits Mother, after awhile, "that I've never seen either of you look so—so stylish. Don't they, Matthew? But I'm sure I don't know what the neighbors are going to say."

"Oh, hang the neighbors!" explodes the Hon. Matthew.

That's what it amounted to, a regular hand grenade chucked into the Jenks household.

"Matthew!" gasps Mother.

"I mean it," says he. "And it's about time I said it. All our lives we've been living the way we thought would please the neighbors, because my job in the bank depended on it. We've been pious and respectable and commonplace. I've worn a black string tie, and side whiskers, because a banker should. And I've listened to dull sermons, and walked with a stiff neck, and never done any of the things I'd like to do. But why keep at it any longer? I'm going to get out of the bank, shave off my whiskers, wear a golf suit, and smoke cigars on the street. And my girls are going to dress the way they want to. If they can't do it here in Tuppertown then we'll move somewhere else. Right into New York, perhaps. We can if we wish. So why not?"

"Bully for you, Dad!" says Sudie Belle. "I always knew you could be a good sport if you only got a start. Come along! Let's get out the touring

car, you light up a big cigar, and we'll drive around town and give the folks a treat. Eh?"

The Hon. Matthew said it was a trade, or words to that effect. They took me to the station to catch the train back and I saw some of the open-faced expressions that Tuppertown indulged in.

"Well?" says Sadie, when I gets home.

"It's all right," says I. "Everything sittin' pretty. Only I expect by this time next week Sudie Belle will either have corrupted Tuppertown or given it heart disease. She hadn't been home half an hour before she was usin' her lip stick on the old maid sister, and I shouldn't wonder if she'd begun on mother by now. Lucky for the Hon. Matthew he's decided to mow his side whiskers. Sudie might have insisted on givin' 'em a henna treatment."

X

THE CASE OF A PINK RED

AND then, when things threaten to get dull, there's always Pinckney. Trust him. If he was dropped on the wrong side of the moon during a dark quarter I'll bet he'd manage to start something. So here the other forenoon when he breezes into the Physical Culture Studio with that cut-up sparkle in his eyes I begin to look for quick action.

"I say, Shorty," says he, "who do you suppose I ran across on Fifth Avenue a moment ago?"

"Ah, who am I that could guess a conundrum like that?" says I. "Spill it."

"Our old friend T. Baskin Wood," says he.

"What! Wood Basket, the pink Red!" says I.

"Only he's no longer a Red of any shade," says he; "in fact, he's rather colorless, opinions as well as complexion."

"Then it ain't Woody," says I. "That face tint of his might easy fade out, as he didn't have much to lose; but them notions of his about what the masses ought to do to the classes was altogether too vivid to be washed out so soon."

"But it has been more than a year and a half

since we've seen him," insists Pinckney. "I didn't realize it has been so long myself until he told me. And do you know, Shorty, something mysterious must have happened to the chap. Never saw such a change."

"Maybe the prohibition drought caught him with an empty cellar," says I.

No, Pinckney waves that aside. I ought to know Woody wasn't that kind. And come to think of it, he wasn't. Oh, he might go through the motions, but if you watched him close you'd see him drown a finger of Scotch with half a bottle of ginger ale and make it last through an evenin'.

More or less of a highbrow, Woody was; wrote pieces for the parlor Bolshevik weeklies, read queer books, and could explain by the hour where him and Debs or Spargo took different tracks. Pinckney used to tow him up to the Studio and get him goin' just for the fun of hearin' us debate. Course, I'd tell him straight how he had squirrels in the attic, and he'd try to show me where, as one of the common people, I wasn't runnin' true to form when I believed all I read in the capitalistic press. Accordin' to him I ought to wear a red necktie and join some group of workers.

"Like you, eh?" I'd say. "A hot worker, you are! Why, all a 7 o'clock whistle means to you is a signal to turn over for another nap."

At which Woody would insist that while he might have been born a social parasite he took no pride in being one and was out to change the system. Oh, he was earnest enough about whatever it was he

thought he believed. He'd get real stirred up talking about the exploited masses, the wage slaves, soulless corporations, and so on. And the way he'd enthuse over the honest toiler almost made you want to grab a pick and a dinner pail and hike for the nearest ditch. But I noticed that Woody didn't work up any palm callouses himself. All he worked was his jaw.

Then when the big war broke loose and when we got into it he seemed to take it mighty hard. He'd sit around gloomy, shakin' his head and mutterin' harsh things about the government. He don't admit being a pacifist, but he claims we had no business mixin' in this sad mess. He was sorry for our poor boys, sorry for the Belgians, sorry for the French, even sorry for the Germans. About the only people that looked good to him was the Russians. Especially after they quit and started this soviet business. He was strong for that, Woody was.

"The ruddy dawn of a new civilization," I remember his callin' it.

"Looks ruddy, all right, if all we hear is so," says I.

It was about then that Woody began pullin' wires to get sent across with some safe and sane outfit of bombproofers. He'd ducked the drafts on account of being under weight and havin' weak eyes, but the next thing we heard he'd broken into the Red Cross, got a job as some kind of field commissioner, and was about to start for Petrograd.

"Look out you don't get to trottin' with Trotzky, Woody," was my partin' word to him.

"I should feel much honored if I could," says he, and off he goes.

Then he drops out of sight. The war is wound up after a fashion, the boys come stragglin' home, the peace convention scrap drags on, but still no sign of Woody. In fact, I'd 'most forgot all about him until Pinckney blows in with this bulletin.

"What was he doin' over there so long?" I asks.

"I couldn't get him to say," says Pinckney. "Which is one reason why I've come for you."

"Eh?" says I, gawpin'.

"As you may remember," goes on Pinckney, "Woody sadly underrates my mental equipment. He thinks I have too frivolous a mind to grasp such great and burning questions as why the worker works. He declines to waste his wisdom on me. Curiously enough he regards your low-grade intellect as a fallow field."

"Say, how do you get that way?" says I. "Whaddye mean, low grade?"

"Pardon the phrase," says Pinckney. "I might state it more subtly but with less exactness. At least you will admit that Woody used to talk quite freely to you. Perhaps he will now. Well, I've arranged to have him take luncheon with me at the club. And I want you to come along, too. We may find out what has happened to him."

"Thanks," says I, "but I don't think I've got time to——"

"I've ordered grilled pigs' feet and stone crab salad," says he.

"Swifty!" says I, callin' into the gym and grabbin' my hat. "I'm likely not to be back until 2:30."

Maybe I could have passed up the grilled pigs' feet at a pinch, but stone crabs—M-m-m-m! They ship 'em up from Tampa about twice a month and this swell club of Pinckney's is the only place I ever heard of their being served. A discovery of his, you might know. And say, when it comes to that kind of explorin' he's got Columbus lookin' like a cop on a fixed post. Talk about broiled lobsters, this stone crab nourishment has the chorus girl's delight beat seven ways. So I takes Pinckney by the arm and starts him down the stairs before he can change his mind. Besides, I might have worked up a little curiosity about Woody myself.

We finds him waitin' for us in the big downstairs lounge, pacin' up and down behind the row of easy chairs watchin' the traffic nervous. I can't see so much change in him at first glance. Maybe he's a little thinner in the neck and face, but he never was much of a husk. And I notice that his hair has frosted up a bit above the ears. Still, it was beginnin' to do that before he left, even if he is only in the late thirties. Only his eyes seemed different. They used to be the steady, piercin' kind, but now they are starey and restless by turns.

I will say, too, that he lets on to be kind of glad to see me. "Ah, McCabe!" says he. "Bully of you to come. How—how's your punch?"

"Oh, I expect I can still steam 'em in with either hand," says I.

"Fortunate person!" says he. "I wish I could. After all, there is a sense of security in being able to do that sort of thing."

"You don't mean, Woody," I goes on, "that you're gettin' ambitious to land a left hook on somebody's jaw?"

"Not precisely," says he, "but there are occasions when it would be a satisfaction to know that one could in—in an emergency."

Pinckney and I swaps glances.

"Oh, come, Woody," puts in Pinckney. "Tell us all about it. You are not being followed by desperadoes, or threatened, or anything of that sort, are you?"

"I suppose not," says he. "Not now. At least, I trust I'm not."

"Which implies that you have been," says Pinckney. "I say, we want to know what you got mixed up in abroad. Didn't meet a dashing countess, did you?"

Woody merely shrugs his shoulders bored.

"When did you trickle back?" I asks.

"Oh, three or four months ago," says he. "I've been staying up at Jimmy Trevor's camp in the Adirondacks—hunting a little, snow-shoeing, fishing some, resting a lot. I needed it. My—my nerves."

"Worst thing you could do," says Pinckney. "The country always gives me a case of nerves if I stay there too long. Too many weird noises at

night. The only place to really rest is in town. You can be comfortable here, and safe."

"Safe!" says Woody. "What an odd idea."

"Listen to him, Shorty!" says Pinckney. "Here he is, in one of the most substantial buildings in New York, shut in by thick stone walls, the windows guarded by steel grills, the entrances watched by keen-eyed, faithful servitors. Why, a stray cat couldn't get in without being seen, much less a strange human being. Our members are all men of substance and standing. Besides, we have within call thousands of policemen. Come, Woody, where could you find a safer spot?"

Woody only shakes his head. "It was in a stronger building than this," says he, "and one surrounded by an army of soldiers at that."

"Eh?" says I as he stops sudden. "What then? Did someone throw a scare into you by grabbin' you by the collar and askin' you the time of day in Russian?"

"It was a trifle more menacing than that," says he. "I was within a few minutes of being stood against a wall to face a firing squad."

"Where?" says I.

"In the Fortress of St. Peter and Paul," says Woody. "That is in Petrograd, you know. I had been sent to look up Kerensky. We wanted him to sign an order releasing several carloads of Red Cross supplies which had been seized by the revolutionary government. He was an elusive person to find, Kerensky, just about then. Someone said he had moved his offices to the Fortress. So I went

there. I waited for forty-eight hours, being sent from one part of the great gloomy pile to the other, showing my papers every few minutes to ignorant moujiks, shunted about by insolent officials. The usual thing. All was confusion. Troops marching back and forth, wild-eyed secretaries running about, swaggering officers coming and going.

"But with the Red Cross brassard on my sleeve and my American passport I felt safe enough. I had a permit signed by Kerensky himself. And they had said he was in the building. True, I had heard some firing going on outside, but that was common enough. And then, the next thing I knew, I was taken prisoner, herded in with a hundred others, shut in a great stone-walled room underground. I was told that the Kerensky government had fallen, that Kerensky had run away days before, that the Reds held the city.

"Even then I thought it would be merely a matter of showing my papers and explaining who I was. But after another frightful day and night fifty of us were marched to an upper chamber and told that we were to be put on trial. So we were. But such a travesty. The three so-called judges were drunk and getting drunker. A few brutal questions and they would order a man led away. We knew what that meant. We could hear the rifles cracking in the court below. Hardly anyone was being let off. My turn was coming. There were but four ahead of me.

"One of the judges rolled off his chair, stupefied by vodka. We waited while a new one was sent in.

He was nearly sober, but more evil-faced than the others. A fat, putty-colored face he had; small pig eyes with bags under them; very bald as to his head, and with his left wrist bandaged. I shall never forget how he looked as he glared at us. In three minutes he had sentenced four human beings to death. Off hand, carelessly, as you would send away a beggar.

"Then I was prodded forward. He snatched away my papers. 'Ah, a cursed Kerenskyite!' he growled in Russian. 'I am an American,' I told him. 'An official of the Red Cross.' 'So?' he grunted in English. 'I need some first aid myself. What is good for the bite of a fair lady?' and he pointed at his wrist. I suggested iodine. 'Too common,' says he. 'This wound was made by the teeth of a countess.' And then he roared as if he had made a grand joke. The other judges roused up and growled. 'Away with the dog of a Kerenskyite!' they urged. 'Where are you from?' asked the pig-eyed one. I told him New York. 'So?' he grunted. 'Me, too. I've worked in New York.' Then they wrangled together. The other two wanted to send me after the ones who had gone out to be stood against the wall. But Pig-eye was undecided. 'It might cause trouble,' he said. 'We should ask Lenine about it. Besides, there are plenty of others, and the soldiers of the squad complain that their guns are getting hot. Save him for another day.' So I was sent back into the big room. I was forgotten. For weeks I was there. We were fed occasionally on wretched food. At any moment

I expected to be called out to face other judges. I don't know why I wasn't. But at last some of my brother officers came searching for me. I was identified, rescued. They got me into a hospital. I was there a long time, months. And when I could walk they let me go. But there was no way of getting out of Petrograd. Hardly any Americans were left. The Red Cross headquarters had been moved to Moscow. Fighting was constant. You dodged out to buy food and dodged back again. An English diplomatic agent gave me shelter, such as it was. We were raided frequently by drunken Reds. For a week our block was bombarded. I never knew why. But at last I had a chance to get into Sweden with some food smugglers. Finally I caught a steamer home. And here I am."

"Huh!" says I. "No wonder you got jumpy nerves, Woody. And I take it you saw enough Bolshevik antics to last you for awhile, eh?"

"Enough for a life time," says Woody. "That's why I feel nervous here. They're in New York, you know; thousands of them."

"Absurd!" says Pinckney. "Newspaper talk. At least there are none in this club. You may count on that. So let's have luncheon."

"Sure!" says I. "It's always a soothin' process, havin' lunch on Pinckney. Best thing he does. And with a knife in one hand and a fork in the other you ought to feel fairly safe."

Woody works up a faint smile. "Probably I shall," says he.

I couldn't see how he could help it, for somehow

in this plute joint, with the heavy hangin's at the high windows, and the thick rugs on the floor, and the waiters movin' about soft and silent like they worked in oiled grooves, it seemed as if the rude common people was shut out complete. At sight of Pinckney the headwaiter acts almost human, tows us to a corner table, and snaps his finger for the bus boys to get busy.

"Yes, sir," says he. "The hors d'œuvres are ready, the grilled pigs' feet next, and then the crab salad. Yes, sir."

"And have Louis serve," adds Pinckney. "He knows how I want things."

"Very well, sir. Louis!" says the headwaiter.

Meanwhile Woody is busy measurin' out a mild shot of Scotch that somebody has found in Pinckney's locker, but the first thing I knows he has dropped a glass and at the crash I looks up to find him starin' bug-eyed at the waiter, who is handin' round the tray of caviar and pickled herring. For a second or so, too, the waiter stares back. Pinckney notices and glances from one to the other."

"Beg pardon?" says Pinckney. "Anything wrong?"

Woody don't say, but keeps on starin' blank.

"The hors d'œuvres, sir," murmurs the waiter.

"Oh! Oh, yes," says Woody.

He don't say anything more until the waiter has left. Then he reaches over, grips Pinckney's arm and whispers hoarse: "That's the man!"

"What?" says Pinckney. "What man?"

"The pig-eyed one," says Woody, "who was judge in the Fortress."

"Oh, I say!" says Pinckney. "Why, that's my old standby, Louis."

"I couldn't mistake that face," insists Woody. "The small pop-eyes, the bald head, the putty complexion, the brutal jaw. He's the very one."

"But, my dear chap," protests Pinckney, "Louis has been my favorite waiter here in this club for ever so long. He's been here for years, in fact; that is, on and off."

"Ah!" says Woody. "He was off during the winter of 1917 and 1918, wasn't he?"

"I believe he was," says Pinckney, "but I'm sure he couldn't have been——"

"I'm sure, though," breaks in Woody. "He was in Petrograd, helping Lenine organize the red terror. It was on his word that I was saved for another day."

"Utterly absurd, old man!" says Pinckney. "Why, we'll ask him."

Woody ain't strong for that, but before he can stop him Pinckney has sent for Louis and put it up to him flat. Don't seem to fuss Louis a bit, either.

"No," says he, shakin' his head and lookin' stupid. "I haven't been in Russia since I came away with my folks, when I was three. Been in New York all the time."

"And you don't remember having seen me before?" demanded Woody.

"No," says Louis, starin' stupider than ever.

"That's all," says Pinckney. Then, turnin' to Woody, he chuckles: "There! You see?"

"Do you imagine," says Woody, "that I could watch for half an hour the face of a man who was deciding whether or not he should send me out to be shot and then not know him two years later? Could you?"

"S-s-s-sh!" says Pinckney. "Here he comes."

I couldn't say just what it was, either; maybe the surly set of the waiter's mouth or a look he gives Woody as he comes in. Anyway, I got my curiosity way up, and as he passes me I reaches out casual and gets a grip on his left wrist, pushin' back the sleeve at the same time. And sure enough, there's a scar.

"Teeth marks, or I never saw 'em," says I.

"Yes, sir," says Louis quick. "A dog did that."

"Must have had his front fangs filed off, then," says I. "Look, Pinckney. Two even crescents. Was it a Countess, Louis, or were you just braggin'?"

That seems to jar him a little, for he pulls his wrist away and covers up the scar. "It was a dog," he mutters.

"Bah!" says Woody. "Why deny it, man? You were one of Lenine's judges in the Fortress. You're a Bolshevik now, I'll wager."

Louis only shakes his head and curls his upper lip surly. "The gentleman mistakes," says he. "I am American citizen. See? I have my papers."

Yep. He springs 'em on us.

"Had 'em right handy, didn't you?" says I.

"And I expect you could prove an alibi in case anybody tried to deport you?"

"I have witness, plenty," says Louis, "that I live in New York all the time."

So what's to be done? If you could catch him with a bomb in his hand or something like that you might induce the Department of Justice to take some action. Probably he would be slapped on the wrist and told "Naughty, naughty!" As it is, we just look at each other blank. Louis, he takes up the platter and steps around beside Woody.

"Pigs' feet, sir," says he. "Very nice, sir."

"Oh, I suppose so," says Woody, helpin' himself liberal. "One might as well."

"Anyway," says I, "he's offerin' a better proposition than standin' you against a wall."

XI

HOBBS AND THE GOLD APPLES

MUST have been six weeks or more back that Sadie calls after me, one mornin' as I'm makin' my usual dash for the 8:17 express, about gettin' that dinin' room clock.

"I wish you'd stop in on your way to the station, Shorty," says she, "and see what Hobbs is doing with it. He's had it nearly a month."

"If you'll make it on my way home tonight," says I, "I'll give him a try. Better plan to have dinner a little late, too. You know Hobbs."

From which you might gather that Mr. Hobbs wasn't a party who could be rushed. And that only half states the case. I've seen people who wasn't much bothered by what they did with their time, from hoboes on a park bench to Johnnies in the club windows, but I don't think I ever ran across one that spent it as free and reckless as T. Hobbs. Seemed to mean no more to him than water runnin' over a dam. Didn't do a bit of good to tell him you were in a hurry, had to catch a train, or get to a directors' meetin'. When he started in on one of his long-winded spiels there was no stoppin' him until he was through.

Course, you might back through the door and leave him talkin', but somehow you didn't just feel like doing that. Not to Tobias Hobbs. No. I can't say just why, either. Unless maybe you knew that was something he wouldn't do to you. And he was such a polite, gentle mannered gink that you'd feel sort of cheap pullin' any rough stuff on him. You wouldn't want to hurt his feelin's.

For Mr. T. Hobbs, jeweler, was an entirely different proposition from most of what Mrs. Boomer-Day always spoke of as "the village tradespeople." You couldn't class him in with Schwartz, the butcher; or Pratt & Miller, the grocers; or P. Glutz, the plumber; or even Phillips, who ran the stationery and book store and wore a shiny frock coat and was on the Board of Education.

Not that Mr. Hobbs tried to put on any highbrow lugs or made any stabs at being a social favorite. He lived quiet and modest in a little tenement over the store, always dressed kind of shabby, and never tried to break into public affairs. Kind of a thin, spindly little man, T. Hobbs, with weak eyes helped out by a pair of thick spectacles, and a skimpy Vandyke beard.

But in his way he was sort of dignified, even when he had one of them single-barreled magnifyin' glasses screwed into one eye as he inspected the inside of a nickel alarm clock. He'd have almost as much to tell you, with the Ansonia relic as an excuse, as he would if you'd brought in a thousand-dollar grandfather's clock. Talk! Say, that was his strong suit. He was a converser from Converse,

Oh, no trouble for him to find a topic. He was a self-starter. From a simple request to put a new crystal in your watch, or to fit you to a new front collar button, he'd branch out into a monologue on the Great Wall of China, who built it, and why, and what effect it had on the Chinese of today; or else he'd tell you how in Jamaica they cut down their banana trees every year and raised new ones that produced only a single bunch.

Must have been a great reader, Mr. Hobbs, though I never could see where he found time. But I expect when he had nobody to talk to he went at it strong. Books and magazines about travels in foreign parts was his specialty, and he was better posted on how they gathered the rice crop in Japan than he was on what Long Island eggs was fetchin' or why the coal strike petered out. He was always sayin' how he'd like to take a trip to this place or that—Spain, or India, or Peru, or Madagascar, and why. He'd even go so far as to write for pamphlets of steamer trips and get rates on these 'round the world excursions.

And yet in the half a dozen or more years I've lived out here in Rockhurst-on-the-Sound I never knew of his gettin' as far away as Coney Island. Why, I don't believe he went into town more'n two or three times a year. Near as I could figure Hobbs was born in Rockhurst, had always lived there, and probably always would. His father had opened a clock and watch garage way back in the early days when Rockhurst was a real country village on the old Post Road. So Tobias had been brought up in

the business. They say he could tinker up a timepiece, 'specially these old antiques with wooden works and ships painted on their faces. But you had to give him a month or so on every job and listen to him about so long when you took in the work and when you finally got it away from him.

Course, he had the reg'lar one-horse jeweler's stock outfit—a line of plated cake baskets, gilt jewel boxes, cut glass vases, and so on. I expect he unloaded some of it on the Dago population and the tenement folks. But the trade couldn't have amounted to much. Then, too, he was always splurgin' on odd side-lines that looked out-of-place in a jewelery store—gold fish in bowls, celluloid toilet articles, a new hand vacuum cleaner, patent dish drainers, potted plants. So you couldn't tell, from lookin' at his show window, what kind of a store it was. Not that Hobbs was 'specially enterprisin', or wanted to branch out, but the drummers found him easy. If they had patience enough to stick around and listen while he described a trip he'd like to take across the Andes mountains and down into the Argentine, or a cruise from Cairo up the Nile, they could sell him a bill of almost any kind of goods. One holiday season I remember findin' him loaded up with a whole showcase full of mouth organs that I expect he never did get rid of.

So you see his business couldn't have called for any phony bookkeepin' to conceal the excess profits. Yet he seemed to get along somehow. Even had the nerve to get married a second time after being a widower less'n a year. Sort of handed his car-

riage trade a jolt by that move, Mr. Hobbs did, and to hear the women folks talk you'd think he'd queered himself for good.

For the first Mrs. Tobias Hobbs was supposed to be quite a superior person, whatever they might mean by that. I'm givin' you Mrs. Purdy-Pell's description of her. I never thought much about her one way or the other. She was one of these large, blond females, that moved about kind of billowy and majestic and got herself up in back number frills. She was always tellin' what a fine family she came from, how one of her sisters had married a bank president up in Connecticut and another was the wife of a leadin' lawyer out in some Pennsylvania town.

Anyway, she played the lady as well as she could, apologizin' for Tobias constant and for livin' over the store. She sang for a while at the Presbyterian Church, and gave piano lessons. Also she had to have a maid to help her do the housework. So she was sort of included in most of the social doin's, 'specially any church affairs. Kind of on the fringe, as you might say. I judged that the women folks made it more or less of a fad to keep her in the swim, callin' for her with their limousines, invitin' her to teas and that sort of thing. Never includin' Tobias, of course. I heard a good deal of sympathy spilled for him when she passed on sudden. They didn't know how he was going to get along without her.

But Mr. Hobbs seemed to bear up under the loss fairly well. Course, he wasn't represented in so-

ciety any more, and he begun takin' his meals at the Acme Café and doin' his own bed makin' and sweepin'. Didn't get any thinner, though. Couldn't have, I expect. But he didn't complain any and went on puttin' in odd side lines and plannin' wild travel trips that he never took.

And then one day it came out that he'd married this Rosie Millette person who'd been a waitress in the Acme. Some French Canadian girl who'd drifted down from Bridgeport where she'd been workin' in a brass fact'ry.

"How could he?" exclaims Mrs. Purdy-Pell.

"Well, that's the end of Hobbs," announces Mrs. Boomer-Day. "He has found his proper level at last."

I expect he did lose some trade there for a while. In time though he got it back. It was too much of a nuisance to lug balky clocks clear into town. And while they didn't forgive him exactly most of 'em overlooked his bad break. As for Hobbs, he actually put on a few pounds. It developed that Rosie was a swell cook. At least, she was some scrubber. The dingy show window of the store was polished like plate glass and kept so, the floor lost its grimy coating of dirt, and the walls was cleaned up. Even Tobias showed the effects by keepin' his hair and beard trimmed.

Outside of that though we never got much of a line on the new Mrs. Hobbs. Oh, I got glimpses of her now and then when I'd drop in. She'd generally be dustin' or cleanin' around, but she always beat it out back whenever any customers came.

And Tobias never mentioned her, any more'n he ever did the first one. He had his own line of chat and stuck to it.

So when I calls for the clock that afternoon I'm kind of surprised to find 'em both out front indulgin' in some kind of debate. Rosie starts to leave, but when she sees who it is seems to think better of it and merely steps into the background.

"Well, what about that dinin' room clock, Hobbs?" says I. "Got it all made over like new?"

"Ah, yes! The clock," says Hobbs, strokin' his beard thoughtful. "Let's see. M-m-m-m. Yes, it's all finished. New pinion, new balance wheel, and a thorough cleaning. Really ought to be regulated a little longer, but——"

"I'll take a chance on it," says I, reachin' across the counter.

"If we were all willing to take a chance!" says Hobbs. "The places we could go to! I was just reading something to Mrs. Hobbs, a little poem by Stevenson. Probably you know it. It begins—

> "'I should like to rise and go
> Where the golden apples grow.'"

"And what I say," breaks in Rosie unexpected, "is why don't he?"

"That's the talk!" says I, joshin'. "Why don't you, Hobbs?"

"Eh?" says Hobbs, gawpin' from one to the other of us.

"Listen, Mr. McCabe," says she. "I've been

hearing him moon along like that for a year and a half, wanting to go here, wanting to go there. Didn't pay much attention to it at first, but I ask you, can you get that all the time and keep still? I can't. He's got me so I want to go, too. And why not?"

"But—but Rosie!" protests Hobbs, starin' at her. "How could we? There—there's the store."

"Bah, Mr. Hobbs!" says Rosie. "What's the use of keeping this third rate junk shop open when we get hardly enough to live on out of it? And now with the rent raised and coal what it is, I don't see the sense. If you want to travel as much as you say you do, why not start? I'm ready."

"There you are, Hobbs!" says I, chucklin'. "Your bluff is called. Go after the gold apples."

Tobias, he stares astonished through his thick panes. "But—but that was merely a—a poetic longing, my dear," says he. "'Where the golden apples grow.' I'm sure I don't know just what Stevenson meant by——"

"I do," says Rosie. "Oranges. They grow in California and Florida, don't they? I'd like to go to either place. So let's."

Hobbs shrugs his shoulders hopeless. "If we only could!" says he.

"Well, we can," says Rosie, her black eyes snappin'. "What's more, we will."

"But—but how?" gasps Hobbs.

"The way lots of other folks go," says Rosie. "In a flivver. Yes, my brother-in-law went that way last winter; took his whole family and drove

all the way from Norwalk to Florida. Got a good job down there too, and drove back again last May. I know where we can get a flivver cheap. My uncle works in a garage in Bridgeport and he'll buy one for us. I wrote him about it last week and he's got one all picked out. All we got to do is sell out here and start. There's clock tinkering to be done in Florida as well as here, ain't there? You could even do some on the way down."

"But—but I've never driven a car, Rosie," protests Hobbs.

"I have," says Rosie, "plenty of times. And you could learn. Anybody can run a flivver, and with your knack of tinkering you could keep it going."

"But travel is so expensive," says Hobbs. "Stopping at hotels and all that."

"Who wants to stop at hotels?" says Rosie. "Give me a frying pan and a coffee pot and I'll get up better meals than you'd find in the average hotel dining-room. I've camped out with my brothers. I know how to make a stove out of two bricks. Whenever we got hungry we could pull up beside the road. You know my pancakes and sausages, and how I can scramble eggs. Well, I can do that outdoors just as well as I can in a kitchen, and things taste a heap better. You'll see."

Them mild eyes of Hobbs begin to beam sort of excited. "That certainly sounds rather alluring, Rosie," says he. "Camping by the roadside down through a dozen states. But—but where would we sleep?"

"We could take a tent, couldn't we?" asks Rosie.

"Or we might fix up the inside of the car so we could put cots across the seat or something. You're so handy that way you ought to be able to do it."

"Why—why, I don't know but I could," says Tobias.

And when I left with the clock under my arm the two of 'em were bent over the counter while he sketched out the ground plan of a flivver sleepin' car.

Course, I'd seen Hobbs enthusiastic over these mind travels of his too often to take much stock in his really startin' anywhere. Maybe he'd talk about it for a week or so, and then switch to something else. Yet it wasn't more'n a few days later, as I was drivin' past, that I caught a glimpse of an odd lookin' affair in the yard back of the jewelry store. So I stops for a look.

And sure enough I finds Hobbs in his shirt sleeves with a full outfit of carpenter's tools and a lot of lumber and stuff piled up. He has taken the tonneau off a second-hand flivver and is hard at work toenailin' studding to a framework of two-by-fours that he's bolted to the chassis.

"What's the idea?" says I. "Buildin' a rollin' bungalow?"

"I suppose it will look something like that," admits Hobbs, "but I don't know as I shall care. If we are to travel we might as well be comfortable."

"Then you're actually goin' to start, are you?" says I.

"Looks like it," says he. "I've sold out the

store. The new man takes possession next week. I think we'll be ready by then.''

''You bet we will,'' says Rosie from the back steps.

Say, she must have kept him at it steady, for I never knew Tobias to finish a job on time before, but when I drops around the followin' Thursday blamed if I don't find 'em 'most ready to pull out.

''What do you think of our land cruiser?'' asks Hobbs, wavin' at the finished product.

''It's all of that,'' says I. ''Why, these private Pullman people have nothing on you, have they?''

It's a fact. What he's erected on that flivver frame is a perfectly good house and lot. Uh-huh. He's sheathed it up on the outside just like a reg'lar cottage, with a door and windows, and a slopin' roof, and even a foldin' back porch.

''Take a look inside,'' says Hobbs, lettin' down some steps.

Well, you wouldn't believe you could get so much room as there is. In front, juttin' out over the hood, is a sort of glassed-in bay window with one of the original seats fitted in for drivin'. Behind that is a combination bedroom, dinin' room and kitchen, with plenty of headroom and the floor covered neat with oil-cloth. On either side are foldin' bunks that can be let down at night, with wire springs and mattresses. Then there's a table with hinged legs so it can be stowed away, a two-burner oil stove, lockers for dishes and supplies and extra clothes, an electric light in the ceilin' run by storage batteries, and even a little wash stand in one corner.

"Where's the bathtub and the refrigerator?" I asks.

"Had to leave those out," says Hobbs, "but I think we can manage. At least, we shall be independent of hotels. We plan to drive as far as we like every day, and then when we come to a good place in the country we shall stop, get our dinner, and spend the night. I've put in screens so that we shall not be bothered by mosquitoes when we get further South, and I figure that we can live in our car all winter, if necessary."

"And you expect to get to Florida in that?" says I.

"We are going to start, anyway," says Hobbs. "Rosie thinks we can get under way early Saturday morning and be down in South Carolina by the last of next week. Then for where the golden apples grow."

Honest, he acts like a kid startin' for his first trip to the country. Looks about ten years younger, too.

"Do you know, Shorty," he goes on, "I've wanted to do something like this all my life, but somehow I never got around to it. Can't say just why I haven't, either, or how it happens I'm really going now."

"I shouldn't wonder," says I, "but what Mrs. Hobbs might have had something to do with it. Anyway, I shall want to hear how you're coming along. Send me a post-card now and then, will you?"

He says he will, and he's been keepin' his word. The first bulletin comes from Washington, where

they'd hung up for two or three days to take in the sights. Then came one from Richmond, and another from Charleston.

"We are living a regular gypsy life," Hobbs writes, "and enjoying every moment of it. Now and then we stop for a day while I repair a clock or two for some farmer. Am making more than expenses. No more shop drudgery for me. This is the life! Perhaps we shall go on and on."

"A flyin' jeweler!" thinks I. "But who would have thought it of Tobias?"

So here the other day when Sadie announces that the Purdy-Pells are thinking of going to Florida for the winter, if they can rent the right kind of a house, I has to chuckle.

"That's nothing," says I. "The Hobbses are there. They took their house with 'em."

XII

WHEN VICTOR GOT GOING

COURSE, when I comes back from lunch and finds Mr. and Mrs. Victor Annis waitin' in the front office of the Physical Culture Studio, I suspicions that I'm to be called on to referee some new move in the career of this more or less interestin' pair.

"Well, what now?" says I, turnin' to the lady, who's the head-liner of this particular domestic sketch team. "Got a scheme for making Victor vice-president of the bank or something?"

But for the first time on record, so far as I've kept the statistics, there's no answerin' sparkle to them black eyes of hers. She's usually such a perky little party, Mrs. Annis. Somehow she reminds me of a spring robin, with her quick motions and the odd way she has of tiltin' her head to one side when she talks. Built something like a robin, too, kind of plump in spots, and yet with slender lines here and there.

Now though, all the snap and perkiness seems to have faded out. She sits there grippin' one hand with the other and her chin down. "Oh, Professor McCabe!" she sighs hopeless. "I don't know what's to become of us. Ask him about it."

"Eh?" says I. "Listens tragic. Shoot it, Victor."

As though he could be persuaded into doing anything impetuous. Not Victor Annis. He's one of these rangy, long-geared parties that looks like he was put together with barn hinges. Enough framework was used up in constructin' Victor to make two or three average men and if it was all well padded he'd weigh close to three hundred. But it ain't. While he's no human skeleton exactly he seems to be all joints and angles and his clothes hang on him as graceful as grain bags draped on a step ladder. He gets under way just as rapid as a heavy freight pullin' out on wet rails and his mental processes ain't much livelier. So I waits until Victor has worked up the proper momentum.

"It's—it's all over with me I'm afraid, Shorty," says he. "I—I've got to quit the bank."

"What's the idea?" says I. "I thought you was gettin' on fine there."

"It's on account of my left lung," says Victor. "I had trouble there once before, and lately—well, I've just been to a specialist. He says I may not last a year if I stick to banking. Says I must do outside work. Right off."

"Oh, well," says I, "they can't always tell. May not be as bad as he dopes it out. Still, you can't take a chance, of course, and maybe you can strike something just as good outdoors."

"Do you know what that fool doctor wants him to do?" comes in Mrs. Annis. "Work in a meat market!"

"I've always heard that was healthy," says I, "specially in one of these big open stands like they have downtown."

"But just think!" says she. "Victor coming down to that—cutting meat in a linen apron and straw cuffs! And after all I've done to get him where he is!"

I nods. It's a fact, as I happened to know. When she found Victor, here a couple of years back, he was stock room porter in a department store. He had the important job of openin' packin' cases and wheelin' the stuff around where it was needed. And from all accounts he was satisfied to keep on doin' that.

I expect he'd still be there, too, if it hadn't been for the birdlike young lady with the snappy black eyes who drifted down from somewhere in Nova Scotia, started as wrapper girl, and in less than six months had worked up to be first assistant head of the corset department. That's where Mrs. McCabe got to know her and how I got rung in on this charge account romance. You see, Sadie begins tellin' what a wonder this Miss Robinson is. Must have got an extra good fit or something. Besides she remembers Sadie for a whole six months, name and address and all, even to the brand of what-you-callums she wears, and in these days when most of the salesladies are so distant and haughty that makes a great hit. I take it they got real chummy.

Anyway, Sadie seems to acquire the whole life hist'ry of Miss Robinson; how her folks were in the salt fish business up there, and the only openin' she

had was either to keep books in the warehouse or teach school; how she'd turned down both chances and made a break for New York with only enough left after paying her fare to stake her to a week's board; and how she'd jumped into the first place she found.

Then later on Sadie heard about Victor. Seems Miss Robinson had discovered him in the stock room. First off it was chiefly because he was the only blue-jumpered hired hand around the shop who could be depended on to fetch up exactly what he was sent for the first time. He might not show so much speed as some of the others, but he was always right. Then when she found he came from Skowhegan, Maine, which was part way up to Nova Scotia, and that his favorite dish was tongues and sounds, and that he knew a lot of Evangeline by heart—well, I take it Miss Robinson just naturally started in to improve Victor's prospects the way she had her own. And the next thing she knew she'd fallen for them eyes of his.

I must say we didn't notice 'em at first. Sadie's report on him, after a glimpse she'd had at the store, was that he was plain-featured and awkward looking. But I decided that was puttin' it mild when Miss Robinson towed him around to the Studio to spring this proposition of hers about getting him into a bank. Plain! Why, that hand-hewn face of his would have had an Abe Lincoln statue lookin' like a life mask of Francis X. Bushman. It's a long, serious face, corrugated like a wash-board, with unexpected knobs and bunches on it, and set off by a

pair of ears that gives him sort of an airplane effect. Also he has a wavy fore-lock of brownish hair that's a reg'lar mane, something after the style of the one worn by Jim Barnes, the crack golfer. I looks him over, from his number eleven shoes up, and smothers a gasp.

"Why a bank?" I asks.

"Because it's so genteel," says Miss Robinson.

"Has he had any experience in that line?" says I.

"He was checker in a lumber yard for two years," says Miss Robinson. "And he's just finished a six months' night school course in banking at the Y. M. C. A. I made him take that and I've been looking over his work. He does it beautifully. Not a mistake. And such neat figures."

"Yes, that might help some," says I, "but——" Here I breaks off to take another doubtful glance at Victor.

"You see," goes on Miss Robinson, "if he can get to be a banker we are going to be married. Aren't we, Vic.?"

"We certainly are, Mollie," says he, smilin' generous and beamin'.

That's when I begun takin' notice of them friendly gray eyes of his. Say, I don't know how he did it, but when he turned 'em loose on you, sort of rollin' 'em timid and apologizin', you couldn't help but feel that here was somebody you could trust with anything you might have, from your watch to your kid sister. Just plain honest, them eyes was, the kind you read about. Never a shift or a flutter, but steady as signboards at a street cor-

ner. And when that wide homely mouth of his unreefed itself it produced the folksiest, most good-natured smile you'd want to meet.

"Then that settles it," says I. "Bank recruitin' is some out of my line, but I'll see what can be done among my friends."

As matter of fact, though, it was really Sadie and Mrs. Purdy-Pell who found the place for him, in an up-town branch of a bank that Purdy-Pell was director of. I understand they had some job shovin' him in, too, for the cashier kicked like a steer and wanted to know why a freak like that should be wished on his staff. He must have stood for a lot of guyin' from the others, but I expect he kept springin' that folksy smile on 'em, and doin' his work patient and accurate, and in no time at all he'd qualified. Then one day when nearly half the force was down with the flu he was told to sub in at the ladies' window and from that on he was kept there. The women simply wouldn't have anybody else wait on 'em but Mr. Annis. I suppose they'd never met a folksy bank clerk before and they were strong for him. Anyway, at the end of the year Victor was drawin' down a good salary, as bank wages go, and Miss Robinson had chucked her job in the thingumbob department to become Mrs. Annis.

Well, her next move is to come out to Rockhurst-on-the-Sound scoutin' for a small cottage. As she explains to Sadie, now that Victor was a banker, she felt they ought to live like reg'lar persons, which you couldn't do in a flat, you know. And

here her luck still held, for she picks up a cute little stone affair right in amongst a lot of our swellest commuters.

Almost before Sadie knew it, little Mrs. Annis had started to edge into the social doings of the neighborhood. Not that she tried to make any splurge on her own hook, or pulled any of the usual climber stunts, but she was such a cheerful, perky little party, and nodded so pleasant to everbody somehow she begun to be asked around. For one thing, the ladies found that she was more or less of a bridge whist shark. Where she could have picked up that butterfly trick in her busy young life was something of a mystery until she admitted to Sadie that she'd been taking a course of lessons from a professional in town, payin' for 'em with expert corset advice that had turned an almost hopeless figure into a stylish stout. Also she'd read books on the subject and had spent hours and hours layin' out dummy hands and playin' 'em.

See how she worked it? First she finds what it is most of the women are interested in, and then she goes after that one thing. Even that doesn't satisfy her, though. She discovers that a lot of evenin' bridge parties are being held and there's quite a scarcity of male partners. So Victor is put through a course of sprouts. By that time, too, Victor is willin' to tackle almost anything she sics him onto. What if the extent of his previous card playin' had been California Jack, or an occasional stab at Shoemaker's Loo? He had to learn what it meant when his partner doubled one no-trump, how to read a

high-low discard, and the need of bidding to the score. I expect it took him more'n a week or so to sop up all the fine points, but he got there.

What was the really big part of this act of Mrs. Annis's was displayin' Victor in public all dolled up in open front party clothes. I expect she did her best, and that's sayin' a good deal, but the effect was more or less surprisin'. Maybe you've seen men who just didn't seem to be built for wearin' a soup-and-fish outfit. Victor was like that. I remember a circus act once where a clown led in a giraffe whose front end had been draped in a Tuxedo and hard-boiled shirt. Somehow I couldn't think of anything else whenever I saw Victor Annis costumed for crashin' into society. The coat sagged away from his long neck like a horse collar, his bony wrists stuck out from the sleeves, and the trousers legs hung in limp folds away from the yawnin' cavern where his vest bulged out from his shirt bosom. Sort of gave you the idea that he was fallin' apart or something. And the resigned look of patient distress on Victor's rugged face made you almost sure that the worst was about to happen.

Still, she kept him at it. He was dragged out on an average of two nights a week to mingle with the flower and chivalry of Rockhurst's smartest set. The other men sympathized with him and I suppose the ladies finally got used to him. I never heard him complain but once, and then he confided to me that sittin' for three hours cramped up at a card table was awful hard on the legs. But I judge that he wasn't what you might call a social success.

So when Mrs. Annis lets out this moan about gettin' Victor where he is my feelin's on the subject are kind of mixed.

"Only imagine!" she goes on. "Victor working in a meat market!"

"Settled on that, have you?" I asks him.

He nods. "I'm sorry, on Mollie's account," says he, "but I've got to do something. They keep the bank too hot, and the air gets bad. The doctor must know. He said it was only a spot, up in one corner, but it would grow worse if I didn't change. I might learn to drive a truck, but that would take time. And Mollie wouldn't like moving back into the country where I could get a lumber yard job. Besides, I know something about cutting meat. Helped out one summer at a market in Skowhegan. And if I could get a place in town we could stay on here."

"But—but what will our friends say?" protests Mrs. Annis.

"If they're real friends they'll stick by us," says Victor; "if they're not——" He shrugs his shoulders.

"Suppose," says Mrs. Annis, glancin' at me shrewd, "suppose they weren't told?"

"They won't hear it from me," says I.

But Victor shakes his head. "I can't go on," says he. "Besides, it was those night affairs that helped wear me out. They—they kind of got on my nerves. No. We'll have to drop all that, Mollie."

"But we needn't say just what you're doing, need we?" she insists.

"I—I suppose not," says Victor.

"Then we won't," announces Mrs. Annis, waggin' her head bird-like.

With which they drifts out. I couldn't see that I'd helped much in this domestic crisis of theirs. Nobody could, in fact. It was going to be rough on the little lady, who'd planned and schemed and worked until she'd lifted herself and Victor from almost the bottom rung of the ladder to what she probably thought was the top. Did she, though? No tellin' what ambitions was still buzzin' under that slick head of black hair. Maybe she'd planned to shove Victor on and on. But now, just as she'd got him well under way the hard hand of fate reaches out and puts a crimp in the whole business. He was goin' to quit sortin' out crisp new bills to lady depositors and go to cuttin' lamb chops and slicin' off round steaks. And somehow I couldn't help thinkin' of Victor's partin' remarks.

"At least," says he, "I mean to be a good meat cutter."

Now what the blazes did he mean by that? As though it was a trade you could shine at!

Anyway, the Annises dropped out. They hung on in the little stone cottage, but hardly anybody saw 'em any more. For one thing, Victor had to catch the 6:45 instead of the 8:03 express, and he didn't get back until all hours in the evenin'. People wondered some but nobody seemed to know just why. It was noised around that Annis had left the bank and taken up another line.

"I don't see why they're so mysterious about it," comments Sadie. "What other line, I wonder?"

"Maybe he's robbing fur lofts," I suggests. "That seems to be a popular industry these days."

"I believe you know, Shorty," says she.

"I'm a knowin' guy, I'll admit," says I.

"Pooh!" says she. "I'm going over to see Mrs. Annis and find out."

She went, but she came back just as wise as she started. Which was no reflection on Sadie's ability as a cross-examiner. I'll bet a whole aggregation of corporation lawyers couldn't have made Mollie Annis spill that secret of hers.

Several months flitted by, as months have a habit of doin'. And then here the other night I comes home to find Sadie all excited. She'd been shopping in town that afternoon and had finished the day by huntin' up a favorite lady corn doctor of hers who'd moved up to One Hundred and Twenty-fifth street.

"And who do you suppose I saw up there, Shorty?" she asks.

"The corn doctor," says I.

"Victor Annis," says she.

"Well, he goes to town every day," says I. "Why not?"

"But I saw him at work," says Sadie triumphant. "He was in the front show window of one of those big meat and produce markets, and he was cutting meat."

"Eh?" says I. "Sure it was Victor?"

"Do you think I could mistake that face?" demands Sadie.

"But why was he in a show window?" I goes

on. "They usually have their meat blocks in the back, don't they? Sounds a bit odd."

"I don't care," says Sadie. "I know what I saw. Only there was such a crowd watching him that I couldn't get very close. If I hadn't been in a hurry I should have gone in. But there he was, cutting meat in a show window."

"Huh!" says I. "Guess I'll have to scout around up there myself tomorrow."

So the next noon I takes a run up; and sure enough, I hadn't walked more'n a block before I located him. It was just as Sadie had described, except that there wasn't any show window. The glass had been taken out and an iron railing run across, leaving a sort of booth effect, inside of which was Victor, dressed immaculately in white duck, with a white chef's cap set jaunty on the back of his head and presidin' behind a white enameled meat block. Out front was a crowd, mostly women, that nearly stopped the traffic, while inside was another bunch watchin' him through the glass partition.

Course I stops and edges my way in, finally gettin' up to the rail right in front of him.

"Hello, Vic," says I. "What you doin' here—givin' an exhibition?"

As he sees who it is he grins and waves a boning knife that looks as sharp as a razor. "Wait a few minutes, Shorty," says he, "and I'll knock off for lunch. Soon as I finish this."

So I hangs up and watches with the others. The operation was worth watchin', I'll say. What he

begins with looks like an ordinary rib roast of lamb, but it don't look that way long. He cuts away at it as skillful as a surgeon eliminatin' an appendix, whittlin' off the ends of the ribs, cutting out some of the middle, and then twistin' the whole thing until it's the shape of a basket. Next he runs the surplus meat through a chopper, pats it into the basket affair, decorates the rib ends with paper frills like they put on French chops, adds parsely and sprays of water-cress, and wraps the thing in oiled paper.

"What do you call it—a meat bouquet?" I asks.

"Crown roast," says Victor. "Rather neat, isn't it?"

"Almost a poem," says I. "Never saw a roast of lamb fixed up as fancy as that before. Where'd you get to be such an artist?"

He don't explain until he's shed his white uniform and we've wandered down the street to a grill room.

"I took lessons of the best meat chef in New York," says he. "Got the notion from the way Mollie learned to play bridge. If that was worth while studying, thinks I, surely what you have to make your living at must be, too. Of course, I began as a plain steak slicer down in a Washington market stall. But as soon as they found I could do the fancy stuff they put me at it. Then I read books about the different ways of cutting meat and dressing game and poultry. Even invented a few tricks of my own. Wish I could show you how I can prepare a turkey for the pan, or a roasting pig, or a tray of quail. Surprising how much you can

learn about this game when you really go after it."

"You've surprised me already," says I. "How did you come to get this show window job uptown?"

"Asked for it," says Victor. "And after I'd shown 'em what I could do they gave it to me. At the end of the week I told 'em I was going to quit unless they paid me my price to stay. They paid. Honest, Shorty, I'm getting nearly twice as much as my bank salary. Besides, I'm enjoying the work more and I've got my health back."

"But still——" says I.

"I know," says Victor. "A banker is somebody and a meat cutter isn't. They say I'm the best in the country, though, and that's something. And I'm not going to stay here long, you know."

"What next?" says I.

"General demonstrator for the Keefe-Collins Company," says Victor. "They own a chain of big resort hotels—one in the White Mountains, another at Atlantic City, two in Florida, one in California, and so on. Mr. Collins, the president, happened to see me at work one day last week. We had a talk and he engaged me to travel around and give lessons to their meat chefs. Signed the contract yesterday. We shall go everywhere, and live well, too. Mollie will like that, I think, even better than going to bridge parties in Rockhurst."

"You sure have landed in luck, Victor," says I. "How do you get that way?"

"It's simple enough," says Victor, springin' that smile of his. "If you can't do what you like, then like what you do."

"Listens easy when you say it quick," says I. "Must be something in it, too. But I expect a lot of folks will still stick to luggin' around the left hind foot of a rabbit and waitin' for it to work."

XIII

THE PART WARRY MISSED

IF I'd suspected this young Warry Bixby had all that up his cuff I'd have side-stepped the whole affair and let him untangle the kinks in his little romance the best way he could. But then, see what I would have missed when Brick Hogan and the Hon. Hi. led the civic virtues down a dark alley and slugged her with a piece of lead pipe.

A good-sized, well-built, nice-appearin' young chap, H. Warren Bixby, but kind of slow-motioned and quiet-talkin'. I always had him sized up as a dead one. Anyway, mostly ossified above the ears. Maybe that was because he'd made such a poor stab at the various things he'd tried since he came home from college. Law was what he tackled first, but after three or four tries at the Regents' exams. without any favorable report from Albany he sort of scratched his entry as one of the coming legal lights of Westchester county.

And I expect that was a hard dose for the Hon. Hiram Bixby to swallow. You know, an only son and all that. But when Warry couldn't tell a tort from a nolens volens the old man got him into a bond house in town where he lasted all of three weeks. Then he gave the life insurance game a

whirl. That was Warry's star performance, I understand. The way they tell it he was set to canvassin' a district over in Montclair. Looked like a good field all right, among all them swell commuters, and Warry starts out loaded down with an armful of literature and blanks. How should he know that the territory had been raked with a fine tooth comb by experts? Most likely he did his best, too, but at the end of five days all he'd interviewed had been butlers and parlor maids, and he hadn't been able to show a single party where to sign on the dotted line.

Finally he gets desperate. It was one afternoon about five o'clock when he'd been shunted away from twenty-seven front doors in succession and his feet hurt him. Way back from the road though was a big double-breasted stone house, and when the maid tries to shut him out as usual he puts his foot in the door.

"Now see here," says he, "I simply must see the man of the house. It's mighty important."

"Very well, sir," says the girl. "I'll tell him."

In a couple of minutes she comes back and says that the master's very sorry but he's too busy to be seen just then.

"Is, eh?" says Warry. "What the blazes is he so busy about?"

"He—he's shaving, sir," says the maid.

"Good work!" says Warry. "Here, give him these blanks. He'll need one in a minute and I have no use for 'em."

Which might have been almost clever of Warry

only it happens that the man who was presented with a year's supply of shavin' paper was vice-president of the company Warry was supposed to be workin' for. So when the story got around it got a good many laughs, but it didn't help boost H. Warren's stock as a business man. I'll bet when the Hon. Hi. heard it he turned turkey red clear up into his white banker side-whiskers. Anyway, he called off Warry's outside career and made him sort of assistant office boy at the First National in Rockhurst-on-the-Sound and let it ride at that.

Not that Warry was an absolute flivver at everything. They say he plays a good game of golf, can drive a stripped roadster almost well enough to qualify for a Vanderbilt cup race, can roll the spotted bones so that others in the game must read 'em and weep, and knows all the latest shimmy steps for these new jazz tunes. In fact, he's a popular young gent in the country club set.

All of which don't help get him in right at home. Hardly. The Hon. Hi. Bixby's notion of spendin' a perfectly good evenin' is to sit in his libr'y and plot out how to unload ten acres of swamp land on out-of-town investors, or figure how he can squeeze a mortgagor so he can foreclose on a corner lot. And he can't see why Warry shouldn't be contented to do the same.

Course, I'm just givin' you my rough guesses on the status quo in the Bixby fam'ly. Me and the Hon. Hi. have run up against one another more or less in town affairs, as maybe you remember my relatin', but about all I knew of Warry was what I'd

heard casual in the smokin' car on the eight-fifteen, or knockin' around at the Yacht and Country Club.

So I'm some surprised, here last Saturday afternoon, as I swings off with the other commuters, to get the hail from the young man.

"Oh, I say, McCabe," says he. "Could I have a word with you?"

"Maybe two or three," says I. "Shoot."

"You're a friend of Brick Hogan's, aren't you?" he goes on.

"In a way," says I. "What then?"

"I haven't met him—that is, formally," says he. "And I'd like to. It—it's about Alicia."

"Oh-h-h!" says I, droppin' my left eyelid knowin'. "I see."

I'd heard Sadie and Mrs. Purdy-Pell and some of the others chatterin' about this affair of Warry's with Alicia Hogan, but I hadn't got much excited over it. In fact, I hadn't taken much stock in their gossip. But now I has to smother a chuckle. This would be kind of a rich mix-up if it was so. Brick Hogan's daughter and the son and heir of the Hon. Hiram Bixby! Well, well! For the Hon. Hi. had been chairman of the Citizen's League that had put Brick Hogan out of business as political boss of the district four or five years back. Came very near gettin' the goods on Brick, too, and sendin' him up the river.

They hadn't though. Not quite. And only last November Brick had come back after several lean years when he couldn't name so much as a school janitor or pull out a street openin' contract. He'd

come back strong, though, and now if you want to pull off any kind of enterprise in this sector, from startin' a new movie house to loadin' the trolley-ridin' public with eight-cent fares, you gotta see Brick first.

Must be more or less profitable, bossin' a district like this, for Brick has bought and moved into a near-Moorish stucco palace on the Post Road, drives around in a shiny limousine that's a cross between a movin' van and a new hearse, while Mrs. Hogan has taken to drapin' herself in pearl ropes and is threatenin' to crash into society.

As for Alicia, she don't seem to give a hoot whether she gets in or not. Some girl, I'll say. And how she has come along these last few years! Why, when I first got to know Brick she was just a long-legged slip of a young miss strugglin' through high school and chummin' with Rosie Salvatora, the Dago cobbler's daughter, and Mamie Muller, who was cashier in her father's grocery store.

Had a habit of carryin' her chin well up even then, although her Daddy was down and out and most of the Rockhurst young ladies looked the other way when she passed by. But now, after studyin' music in Boston for a couple of years, and havin' won the ladies' singles tennis cup at Agawampus, she's quite a different party. She's tall and straight and graceful, and them black eyes of hers are some brilliant. Don't seem to make much difference what she wears, from a ridin' costume to a ball dress, she's a star. And you can't blame Warry much for taggin'

around after her at the Club dances. But when it comes to his gettin' in so deep that he wants to talk to her father—well, that develops an interestin' situation.

"Alicia Hogan, eh?" says I. "Won't this be kind of a jolt for the old man?"

Warry shrugs his shoulders. "I've heard his opinions on the subject," says he. "Perhaps you can guess what they are. That is one reason why I must see Mr. Hogan at once."

I didn't quite follow this, but I piles into the roadster with Warry and five minutes later I'm towin' him into the front office of Hogan & Co., general contractors. The young lady stenog. says how Mr. Hogan is engaged just then.

"Yes, he generally is," says I. "But you tell him it's Shorty McCabe and see if he can't break loose."

He could and did. But there's a curious flicker in them shrewd, steady eyes of his when he sees who's with me.

"Well, Shorty?" says he, leadin' us into an adjoinin' room and wavin' us to take chairs.

"Brick," says I, "shake hands with Warren Bixby. He's the young man that——"

"Yes, I think I understand just who young Mr. Bixby is," breaks in Brick. "Let's see, you've been running around with Alicia some, haven't you?"

Warry pinks up under that and shuffles his feet nervous, but he gets a grip on himself and looks Brick straight between the eyes.

"It's gone further than that, Mr. Hogan," says he. "I have asked Alicia to marry me."

"The blazes you have!" says Brick. He lets it out sort of crisp and gruff, but I can tell by the way his mouth corners soften up that it ain't the most unwelcome news he could hear. "Well, had any luck?"

"The best I could wish for, sir," says Warry.

"Hah!" says Brick, turnin' a chuckle into a grunt. "What about the folks at home? Talked it over with them, have you?" Warry nods. "That's why I'm here," says he.

"I don't get you," says Brick. "They're not enthusiastic? That it?"

Another nod from Warry. "Especially father," says he. "I may as well acknowledge, Mr. Hogan, that we've had a grand row over the matter. He made all the usual threats, about cutting me off and turning me loose, and that sort of thing."

"And you want to weaken, eh?" sneers Brick.

"No," says Warry. "I've been through all that before. Besides, it's time I got out and hustled for myself. I think I know how to do it now. I'm willing to try, anyway. But, among other things, father said about you was something that I'd like cleared up before we go on, so that I may know just where I stand. Mind you, it's not going to make any difference between Alicia and me. Not the slightest. Only, if it should happen to be true, it might affect our plans."

"H-m-m-m!" says Brick, eyeing him steady.

"Well, what neat little left-handed compliment did your respected father pay me?"

"It—it wasn't a direct accusation," hesitates Warry.

"No, it wouldn't be, coming from him," says Brick. "Hinted at something, didn't he? Just what?"

"That you handled the yellow dog fund which put that Inter-State trolley franchise steal through the last Legislature," says Warry. "The one that the attorney-general is investigating."

At which Brick Hogan never even flickers an eyelash. "Oh, that!" says he. "Gave you to understand I was mixed up in the deal, did he? Nothing very new about that, son. I'm the district leader and, of course, they try to tag me with it. Just politics, young man." And Brick shrugs his shoulders careless.

"But he as good as told me," goes on Warry, "that you were almost certain to be indicted for bribery within the next forty-eight hours."

"Naturally," says Brick. "This is a hold-over grand jury. It's the opposition taking a final kick at me. Only the boot is never going to land."

"Father seemed sure it would," insists Warry. "He'd just had some direct news. It seems that one of your strikers got rather badly scared when a deputy served him with a summons; trotted right down to the district attorney's office, in fact, and turned State's evidence."

"Eh?" says Brick, them bushy eyebrows of his

humpin' up. "You didn't hear who that was, did you?"

"Yes," says Warry. "A bookkeeper in the water works department who had carried some of the money to Albany. Chap by the name of Feltner."

"Feltner!" Brick Hogan lets it out gaspy and husky. "I'll get that chicken-livered shrimp for this. You'll see."

Warry stares at him curious. "Then—then you don't deny?" he asks.

"Bah!" says Brick. "Feltner's a sore-head, that's all. Wanted another raise and didn't get it. Always whimpering about his sick wife and his big family. That for him!" And he snaps his fingers.

"That isn't denying, though," protests Warry.

"I don't have to," says Brick. "See here, whose word would you take quicker than mine in this affair?"

"I don't know," says Warry. "And I shouldn't be asking you, Mr. Hogan, if it wasn't going to make such a difference in our plans; Alicia's and mine, I mean. You see, we had settled on the fifteenth of next month for the wedding. I wanted to do it right—church ceremony, bridesmaids, ushers, all that sort of thing. But, of course—if—if——"

"I see," comes in Brick. "If I'm going to be in jail about that time it would be awkward. Well, suppose I should be? What then?"

"We would just slip off somewhere and have it done quietly, tomorrow or the day after," says Warry.

"You mean that?" demands Brick.

"I have my suitcase all packed and stowed in the back of the roadster," says Warry.

"Say, you're rather a game youngster," comments Brick. "Didn't think it was in you. But you needn't worry. I've been in politics twenty-five years and never served a day's sentence yet. I shall still be at liberty on the fifteenth of next month. And as for my innocence—say, when was it you heard all this alarming stuff from your father?"

"Last night, sir," says Warry.

"Ah!" says Brick. "He may have found out since then that his information wasn't trustworthy. We'll see."

With that Brick reaches behind him and pushes open a door. "Hey, Bixby!" he calls out. "Step in here a minute, will you?"

I don't know which of us was more bug-eyed, Warry or me, when the Hon. Hi. Bixby, white side-whiskers, black string tie, gray spats and all appears from Brick Hogan's private office. He's holdin' his neck stiff as usual, but his face is pinked up considerable and his long fingers are twitchin' nervous.

"You've heard the little chat we've been having; eh, Bixby?" says Brick.

The Hon. Hi. admits that he has.

"Then you know what's bothering your son at present," Brick goes on. "Perhaps you can relieve his mind some as to the safety of his future daddy-in-law?"

"H-m-m-m!" says the Hon. Hi. clearin' his throat. "The—ah—reports which reached me yesterday do

seem to have been somewhat exaggerated, I confess."

"That's mild but cheering," says Brick. "And now as to my connection with those bribery charges? You have a copy of that franchise bill in your pocket, haven't you? Let's have it on the desk here."

The Hon. Hi. produces the document from an inside pocket.

"Good!" says Brick. "And you're chairman of the executive board of this same trolley company, aren't you, Bixby?"

"I suppose I am," admits the Hon. Hi.

"And you were consulting me as to the probable validity of this franchise in case this bribery investigation got too hot, weren't you?" says Brick. "Wouldn't be doing that, would you, if you believed I had done the bribing, eh?"

"Hardly," says the Hon. Hi.

"How about it, son?" says Brick, turnin' to Warry. "Feel easier in your mind?"

"Very much, sir," says Warry.

"Then we'll let you run along," says Brick. "You and Alicia will be wanting to fix up that church wedding affair. Let's make it a bang-up one, eh?"

"Thank you, sir. We'll do that all right," says Warry, and hurries out beamin' joyous.

The door has hardly shut behind him before Brick Hogan sets that rugged chin of his and whirls on the Hon. Hi.

"Thought you could double cross me, did you?" he demands. "Willing to use me in your financial schemes, but when it comes to a Bixby-Hogan wed-

ding you mean to block it if you have to stand me on a trap door and press the button. Eh?''

''My dear Mr. Hogan,'' protests the Hon. Hi., ''you have entirely misunderstood my purposes. I assure you that I——''

''You needn't,'' cuts in Brick. ''We know each other too well for that, Hi. Bixby. You've got what you want. Now I'm going to have what I want. Those young people's plans are not to be interfered with. Understand?''

''But—but there's Feltner,'' suggests the Hon. Hi.

''Who signed his bail bond? You?'' says Brick.

The Hon. Hi. nods.

''Then we'll count that in as one of the unlisted wedding presents,'' says Brick.

''You—you mean—'' begins Bixby, his jaw droppin'.

''Exactly,'' says Brick. ''Feltner disappears. He'd better catch the Montreal express tonight. You'll see to that, Bixby.''

''But—I—I——'' protests the Hon. Hi.

''Perhaps you'd like to have me go before that grand jury? Would you?'' asks Brick, his jaw stuck out.

''I think I get your point of view,'' says Bixby. ''And, of course, if we are to consider the happiness of our young people, it is probable that you are quite right. I—er—I'd better see Feltner at once.''

With which he backs out, leavin' me with my mouth open and Brick Hogan wearin' one of them grim campaign grins of his.

"Didn't forget I was here all the while, did you, Brick?" says I.

"No, Shorty," says he.

"If I was to give a guess," says I, "I think I could name the party who handled that trolley money."

"Oh, yes," says he. "So could a thousand other men in this district. But no judge would let you put your guess before a jury. So what's the odds?"

"I'm kind of sorry I heard as much as I did, though, Brick," says I. "Course, I know crooked deals like that are goin' on all the time, but——"

"I get you," says Brick. "They rung you in on that Citizen's League a few years back, didn't they? Well, you saw how they managed affairs after they got me out. Made a mess of 'em, didn't they? And inside of two years the pure, high-minded citizens who were going to give us such a wonderful reform administration just got tired and quit. And I climbed back on the driver's seat and took the reins once more. Why? Because I know how. And am I in this thing for my health? Not me. I'm an expert and I want an expert's pay. So why put up a howl if I collect from those it hurts least to unbelt? Eh?"

Well, I didn't have the answer. I ain't figured it out yet. All I'm reasonably sure of is that Warry Bixby is goin' to marry Alicia Hogan and that a party by the name of Feltner is unaccountably missin'.

XIV

SHORTY HEARS FROM TAMARACK

"HEY, Shorty," says Swifty Joe the other mornin', comin' into the front office of the Physical Culture Studio, "here's a lot more mail for that High-bee party."

"Meanin' Higbee, I expect?" says I. "Well, dump it on top of the safe with the rest."

Swifty proceeds to sort it out careful, the second class in one pile, the letters in another, and stacks it neat on the other piles. For anything with a postmark on it is sacred to Swifty. He don't average more'n two letters a month himself, I suppose, but four times a day he has his ear stretched for the postman's whistle and has to paw all over mine first to see if he hasn't drawn something. Even oil stock circulars and pamphlets from ready-made clothing houses he'll open expectant and lug home to show to the wife.

So this heap of postal junk that's been pilin' up for the last five or six weeks for Milt Higbee gets him some impressed. "Must be some guy, this High——"

"Hig," I puts in.

"Well, anyway," goes on Swifty, "he's a reg'lar person, ain't he?"

"If you let him tell it," says I.

"Ahr-r-r chee!" says Swifty, usin' only the southwest corner of his mouth. "If he wasn't why should they write him like this—The Hon. Milton High—Hig-bee, Esq.? Where's he at, anyway?"

"Give it up, Swifty," says I. "Looks like he was on his way to New York. Probably he'll be blowin' in here some of these days and then you'll have a chance to feast your eyes on him." And I swallows a chuckle.

For Milt. Higbee ain't just the party you'd naturally load down with any such titles. Not if you knew him. Little shrimp of man with watery blue eyes and thin sandy hair. He has a way, though, of swellin' his chest out and walkin' on his tiptoes, like a prize bantam, and he makes as much of his 62 inches as anybody of his height I ever met.

Let's see, it must have been a dozen or fifteen years ago, maybe more, that I first ran across him out in Tamarack, Mich. Back in the days when I held the championship belt and was on one of my exhibition tours, takin' on the local pugs for 60 per cent of the gate. I remember how sore I was at my fool manager for billin' me to make this jump from Grand Rapids to Tamarack, a place that was hardly on the map. And the first thing we heard on landin' there was that the Opera House had burned down the night before.

Next thing we heard, though, was the squeaky voice of Milt. Higbee. We'd hardly got off the train before he was at it. Couldn't shake him off, either. He follows us to the hotel and pumps it at us all

through breakfast. Seemed he owned a roller skatin' rink somewhere on the outskirts of Tamarack and he was dead set on our usin' that instead of cancellin' the date. Mostly to get rid of him, but partly because we had a two-days' layover ahead of us, I gave the word to sign up with him.

Grateful! Say, right there I made a friend for life. For the next twelve hours I had him at my heels, offerin' to do things for me and tellin' me all about his career. At that it wasn't such a fascinatin' or thrillin' tale. But Milt. insisted on going into all the details, startin' with where he was clerkin' in a grocery store at Petoskey when an aunt in Lowell, Mass., died and left him nearly $9,000 on account of him being her only nephew. Then he'd promptly married Luella, the boss's daughter, and chucked his job.

His next move was to hunt up this Tamarack place and go into the real estate business. Where he got the idea he was cut out for a real estater, or why he picked Tamarack as a likely field was two mysteries he failed to explain. Anyway, he goes on to relate how he had bought this hundred-acre tract and staked out a perfectly good addition to Tamarack's residential section. The street railroad people had promised him they would extend their line out to his property and he had it all doped out how the town was bound to grow his way.

But it didn't. First off an outside corporation bought up the street car line and built an extension in just the opposite direction, out to where some of the officials was developin' a little side issue of their

own. And somehow he couldn't induce anybody to buy his corner lots and start the boom. So Detroit avenue and Superior boulevard got choked up with fennel weed and scrub oak, and the little one-story shack where Higbee had hung out a big sign down on Main street, Tamarack, was chiefly used as a loafin' place by a few of his friends who dropped in now and then for a game of checkers. The blue print maps faded without any of the plots being blocked off in red ink as sold.

Then, about the end of the roller skatin' craze, Higbee raised enough money to build this barn of a rink. He was desperate. He meant to make Tamarack come out to his property, whether or no. But Tamarack didn't. Two managers failed to make a go of the rink, after which it stayed vacant, except for the birds that flew in through the broken window panes where boys had tried out their slingshots. Milt Higbee wouldn't give up, though. He opened up the little office at 9 A. M. every day, hung around lonesome until 5 P. M., and managed to scrub along on the insurance busines he could pick up.

So you can see why he was on hand the mornin' after the Opera House burned. Right after breakfast he insists on loadin' me and my manager into a buckboard and drivin' out to Higbee Park. I don't know as I've ever seen a more forsaken place. You know—street corner signs, staggered crazy through the weeds, burnt spruce stumps stickin' up here and there, and in the middle this great, weather-beaten shack of a rink loomin' doleful. But Higbee went on to tell us hopeful how some day all these

plots would be built up with fine houses. Even tried to sell me a lot, and when I sidestepped the investment he offered to give me one. I had to tell him I'd been converted to the Single Tax theory and didn't believe in holdin' land I couldn't use, in order to get out of it.

I did have to stop at his house and be introduced to Luella. Quite a whale of a girl, Luella was. You might know a strutty little wisp like Higbee would pick out an over-sized wife. And the loose cotton wrapper she was wearin' didn't make her look any more sylphlike. She was fryin' potatoes for dinner, I remember, and came into the front room with her face the color of a turkey's neck. Wasn't any too enthusiastic about meetin' company either, I judged from the looks she gave Milt.

Around the hotel that night I got a slant on where Milt. Higbee stood. "Huh!" says the landlord grinnin', "Milt. took you out for a view of his addition, did he? Know what we call it? Higbee's subtraction. Sometimes Minus Park. Sold a lot out there, once, Milt. did, but before he could deliver the deed a cruel keeper led his customer back to the asylum. Ought to ask the boys to tell you about that auction Milt. pulled off once. It was a scream."

From all of which, as well as from other remarks along the same line, I sort of gathered that Mr. Higbee's real estate enterprise was Tamarack's big joke. And I expect that night when I punched the ring ambitions out of two young sawmill hands there never had been so many people in Higbee Park, and hasn't been since. But it left Milt. with more real

money than he'd seen in a heap for years and he never forgot it. Used to write me reg'lar once a month, tellin' how Luella was well, only she'd fleshed up some, and how he had a prospect from Saginaw out to the Park and almost sold him a lot.

Then here five or six years back Higbee drifts into the Studio, dressed kind of seedy, but with a hopeful flicker in them weak blue eyes. A mild boom had hit Tamarack—some firm had put up a wood pulp mill and a patent chair bottom factory had located there. Milt. had got the hunch that if he incorporated his development scheme he could come on East and sell the stock to weak-minded investors. Hung around a couple of weeks before he gave it up and went back. I was kind of sorry for him at the time. Course, he was a good deal of a bore, but if ever optimism came concentrated in a small package Milt. was it.

"I hate to give it up this way," he said as he left, "for I'm dead sure if I could get at the right parties here they'd be interested and put up the capital to develop that splendid property. I'd make a go of it, sure as you're a foot high. But I just couldn't seem to find 'em. Worst of it is, the boys are going to kid me more'n ever when I get back. But I'll show 'em some day. You'll see."

"That's the stuff, Milt.," says I. "Took Columbus over 300 years to develop America after he found it, remember."

I only heard from Milt. a few times from then on, and after a while only by a card at Christmas or New Year's. Then all of a sudden this mail begun

to come in for him, sent in my care. I didn't know why and didn't do much guessin'. All I could figure out was that maybe he'd quit Tamarack and was driftin' around lookin' for a job, expectin' to strike New York eventually. Only glanced over the stuff casually. Course, there was quite a bunch of it, but Milt. always was great for writin' letters on his flashy business paper, so I took it for granted that most of these were from people declinin' to invest in his real estate. All that correspondence made a hit with Swifty Joe, though. He thought it ought to be stowed in the safe and when I wouldn't let him he used to dust it off careful every day.

"Chee!" he'd remark. "Glad this ain't my mail knockin' around like this. It would get me nervous."

"Yes, I expect it would," says I.

And here day before yesterday, as I'm gettin' into my street clothes after puttin' one of my reg'lars through a half-hour session, Swifty comes rushin' into the gym and whispers husky:

"Say, Shorty, he's come!"

"Eh?" says I. "Who's come?"

"The Hon. Higbee, Esquire," says he. "There's a lady with him, too. Some swell girl, I'll say."

"Whaddye mean, swell?" I demands.

"Oh, dolled up elegant; furs 'neverything," says he.

"Can't be Milt, then," says I.

But it was. Milt. in a mink lined overcoat and sportin' gray spats and a cane. Also Luella, draped

in sable with real tails danglin' in rows, and a Pekingese dog cuddled under one arm.

"For the luvva Mike!" I gasps. "Where did you drop from?"

"Just up from Bermuda," says Milt. "We're stopping at the Plutoria."

"The Plutoria! you are?" says I. "Then the boom did get to your addition, after all?"

"No," says Milt. "It's the same old Minus Park. Only the rink isn't there any more. The boys touched that off Armistice night."

"But you must have struck something somewhere," I insists. "Don't tell me you've planted another aunt."

"No," says he. "I ran out of aunts some time ago. It was the Park that made good, too, only not just the way I'd planned. You see, quite a spell back I got hold of a man who'd just landed in Tamarack. Course, I tried to sell him a lot or so. He claimed he was broke, hardly had money enough to get back to Escanaba with. But I didn't let up just for that. I offered him easy terms, a dollar down if he wanted. I always did. No, he wouldn't even risk that. Wouldn't let me show him the Park. 'Tell you what I will do, though,' says he, after a while. 'I don't know anything about these lots of yours, but they can't be any more worthless than a farm I've just left down in Texas. Two hundred acres in it. And if you're so dead set on making a trade I'll take two of your corner lots and swap even.' 'It's a go,' says I. 'Been more than five years since I've sold a foot of land to anybody and I want to see what

it feels like.' So we closed the deal and he left on the next train.''

''Texas, eh?'' says I. ''And it turned out to be in the oil section?''

''Bang in the middle of it,'' says Milt. ''Gushers all over the place. You know what that means, I suppose? Why, the lease for one little corner ran to over a hundred thousand. Cash, Shorty. All at one clip. Say, maybe we lost any time shaking the dust of Tamarack off our feet. Eh, Luella?''

''I should say not,'' says Mrs. Higbee, hunchin' her shoulders into the sable haughty. ''Tamarack! Huh!''

''Then you've quit the old town cold, have you?'' I asks.

''Absolutely,'' says Milt, rappin' his walkin' stick on the floor. ''No more of that one-horse, backbiting, scrubby little town for us. We've had plenty, thank you. Eighteen years of it, and not a man or a woman there we could really count as a friend. Oh, maybe two or three. But that's all.''

''What you been doing since you left?'' says I.

''Oh, traveling around,'' says Milt. ''Tried California for a few months. Sort of dull, though, sitting around in them big hotels with nothing to do but take sight-seeing trips, men nearly all playing golf and the women bridge. Luella and me felt kind of out of it. So we started off on a South American tour, down the West coast, across the Andes to Buenos Ayres, then up to Rio and so on back. Landed here in a blizzard and caught the first boat for Bermuda. Same thing there as in Cali-

fornia—golf, bridge and sight-seeing trips, and everybody strangers to us. Say, Shorty, you don't know how good it seems to see somebody we know. Come up and have dinner with us, won't you?"

"Can't make it tonight, Milt.," says I. "Maybe some night next week. But tell me, how long has this been goin' on?"

"Let's see," says he, "we left Tamarack about nine months ago. Seems years, though. Haven't heard a word from there since we sailed for South America. Knew we'd end up here so I had my mail all sent to you. Hope you didn't mind?"

"Not a bit," says I. "I think it has worried Swifty some, though. Such a stack of it. There it is, stowed on top of the safe."

"Huh!" says Higbee, pokin' at it careless with his cane. "Does look like quite a lot. Not important, though. Mostly circulars and royalty statements, I suppose. I'll send a porter down for the collection later on."

"Then you're goin' to settle down with us in New York for a spell, are you?" I asks.

"Only while we're getting our passports for France," says he. "Mean to take a look at the battlefields and then jog around until we find some good place to camp for a few months, in Italy, maybe, or Egypt."

"Think you'll like it, livin' among foreigners?" says I.

"Between you and me, I don't," says Milt. "But Luella wants to try it."

"Why, Milton Higbee!" protests Luella. "You

know very well you're the one who keeps us on the move. I don't like it a bit better than you do. Honest, Mr. McCabe, I've been so lonesome lots of times that I've just gone to my room and cried."

"And I've tipped hotel waiters just to talk to me," says Milt. "Maybe you'd like to go back to Tamarack; eh, Luella?"

"Don't talk foolish, Milt," says she. "I wonder, though, how the old stick-in-the-muds out there are getting on. Hand me some of those home papers, will you?"

"The 'Tamarack Evening Record,'" says Milt., rippin' the wrapper off one of 'em, "otherwise known as 'The Evening Wretched.' Poorest apology for a newspaper printed in the whole country, bar none. Here you are, Luella. Friday, Oct. 29th. That ought to be good and ripe by this time."

Mrs. Higbee sniffs scornful as she opens it to the local page and adjusts her platinum lorgnette. Milt. shucks the wrapper off another and settles himself in a chair. For a minute or so all I hear from either of 'em is a grunt or a sniff. Then Luella chuckles.

"Well, what do you think, Milt.?" she breaks out. "Sue Harkley has gone and married that young Miller fellow, the one who carried on so with that grass widow, Tillie French, after he came home from the army. I don't see how she could. But he must have steadied down some. I see it says he has a position in the First National."

"Oh, Al. Miller's all right," says Milt. "Little frisky after being in France so long, but there's good stuff in him. Say, I see how old Tim Hendry's

had another stroke and has had to quit business for good. I expect that son-in-law of his will have to run the furniture store now. And the Presbyterians have raised fifteen thousand to build a new church; Indiana limestone, with a spire. That'll be quite an addition, won't it?"

"They've started up the Fortnightly Euchre Club," comes in Luella. "First meeting at the handsome new residence of Mrs. William Degrow, on Huron avenue. Humph! Reads well, doesn't it? Remember how she bragged that they were going to put in a tiled bathroom and steam heat, and then when they got the contractors' estimates concluded to leave out the tiling and get along with a hot air furnace? But I suppose that two-story stucco house with its dinky porte cochere looks pretty swell to Tamarack. And the Degrows pretend to be——"

"I say," breaks in Milt. "Who do you guess is dead, Luella? Judge Abel Martin! And Mrs. Martin plans to live with her sister in Milwaukee. Going to sell the old mansion. Got it advertised, furniture and all."

"You don't mean it, Milt!" says Mrs. Higbee. "The very place you always said you meant to buy when the Park made good. How—how much do you think it could be bought for?"

"Oh, that'll go cheap," says Milt. "Too big for most folks, too much ground. Two acres of lawn to keep up."

"But it—it wouldn't be too big for us, would it, Milt.?" suggests Luella.

"I should say not," says Higbee, swellin' out his

chest. "And you know, Luella, that could be made a mighty fine house, with a little building over. I could get one of those crack architects from Grand Rapids to draw the plans and make it a regular humdinger, like some of those swell places we saw out to Los Angeles. Best location in town, you know. Course, the grounds would have to be landscaped modern and all that. Wouldn't it knock their eye out if we should do it, though?"

Mrs. Higbee is just gazin' starey over the top of Milt.'s head.

"I rather guess I could entertain the Fortnightly then, eh?" she puts in, after a minute.

"And maybe they'd let me into the Tamarack City Club," suggests Milt.

"Well, why not, Milton?" demands Luella.

"Gosh, Luella!" gasps Higbee. "That's what I say. Let's!"

And blamed if they don't go to a fond clinch right there, spillin' the Pekingese and the Evening Records all over the floor in their excitement.

"Excuse us, Shorty," apologizes Milt., "but we—we——"

"Go to it," says I. "My guess is that you're on the right trail at last. Might be interestin' enough wanderin' around France and Italy, but I'll bet you'll have more fun back in Michigan makin' the Tamarack folks sit up."

It was a decision, all right. They checked out at 10 A. M. the next morning, Milt. only havin' time enough to call up over the 'phone to say good-bye.

"Hardly slept a wink all night, either of us," says

he. "Both planning what we mean to do to Tamarack when we get there. I'm going to buy in on the street car line for one thing, and run the tracks out to Higbee Park. Going to have a house on every blamed lot if I have to build 'em myself. Said I'd show 'em sometime, you know."

"Sic 'em, Milt.," says I. "Make 'em change that minus sign to a plus. And I'll bet when Mrs. Higbee displays that wardrobe of hers in Tamarack she'll have the Fortnightly ladies jumpin' through a hoop for her. Eh?"

And as I hangs up I hears Milt. let out a chuckle.

XV

AN ATRIUM THAT WENT WRONG

IT'S a new line for me, I'll admit. This Shylock real estater act. And if I hadn't already flivvered in my openin' scheme I doubt if I'd had the nerve to go on with it.

You see I got myself rung in as a mortgagee here a few years back by tryin' to help out a young artist party who'd started to build himself a house down on the Point, which is really the highbrow section of Rockhurst-on-the-Sound. Nice, decent chap he was, too. Not one of the long-haired, short-brained kind. More or less of a reg'lar person, this Dicky Horton was. Really worked at it. Turned out pictures for magazine covers, colored page ads. for perfumery, fire extinguishers, breakfast foods, anything that was ordered.

Dicky had this little stucco affair of his all finished and was about to move in when he was jinxed seven ways. First off the war put a crimp in the art game so that all he could find to do was Red Cross and Liberty bond posters, which he was paid for in thanks—sometimes. Then he got bumped by a taxi one night and was laid up for a couple of months, and he'd barely limped out of the hospital when the little wife was taken off by the flu, which left Dicky

mighty discouraged and flat broke. He wanted to quit and go back to the old farm out near Peoria for a good rest. So I writes him a check for what equity he has in the place, pays up the contractor's lien, and takes over the property.

Course, it wasn't a good buy. Sort of freaky near-bungalow Dicky had built after his own ideas. The ground floor was mostly studio, with no windows except one whaling big skylight on the north side. He had tacked on a dinky kitchen and a couple of chambers with a sleepin' porch as sort of an after-thought. But there's no butler's pantry, or room for a maid, and no garage. So it didn't rent easy, even after the house shortage got so bad. It stood idle for a year or so and I wrote Dicky urgin' him to come back and take it off my hands at his own terms. But Dicky had picked up a new job with a Chicago firm of ad. agents and was plannin' to marry an old girl of his in Peoria and couldn't see it at all.

Which was a few of the reasons I was so easy with this young couple who finally showed up and asked for my lowest selling price. I must say I wasn't impressed much by either of the Roland Pottles. That's the name they gave. And Roland looked it. A sallow-faced, hollow-chested gink with dead black hair that hung over his coat collar in the back and a bored look in his dead black eyes. He had a bamboo walkin' stick hung on one arm and wore yellow gloves, but his pants needed pressin' bad and his collar had been to the laundry too often, but not too recent.

Young Mrs. Pottle wasn't so worse. A perky, bright-eyed little party who glanced admirin' at Roland constant and gushed enthusiastic over the house.

"It's simply too darling for words, isn't it, Roland, dear?" she asks.

"Oh, perhaps it might do," says Roland airy. "I can't say I fancy the outlook. There should be a vista cut through those trees so that one might have a glimpse of the water. Perhaps that could be arranged, however."

"Well, hardly," says I. "Them maples happen to be on the Boomer-Day estate and he wouldn't let you chop one of 'em down for any money. If you want the house I guess you'll have to pass up the vista."

"Oh, please, Roland, let's take it," urges Mrs. Pottle.

And after stallin' around some more Roland agrees. Come to find out, though, all he was willin' to pay down was about twenty-five hundred. Still, with the balance bringin' me in six per cent that was better than carryin' it, so we closed the deal. And I noticed that it was the young lady who signed the check.

First off I thought the Pottles was goin' to show a lot of class in the neighborhood, for they had the grounds fixed up neat and then splurged on a couple of big porcelain jars with tall spindly cedar trees in 'em set on either side of the front door. The effect is quite stunnin' and Christmas-cardy.

Next we hears from Mrs. Boomer-Day that

Roland Pottle is a headliner in the interior decoratin' business. "He has simply wonderful ideas," she confides to Mrs. McCabe. "So artistic, you know. I am going to have him do over my music room. Such talent as he has ought to be encouraged, don't you think?"

But a week or so later Mrs. Boomer-Day had another thought. It seems that Roland's wonderful ideas would run into big money if carried out. All he wanted to do to the music room was to revise the window and wall scheme, give the interior woodwork an egg-shell finish of Maeterlinck blue—nine coats rubbed down with oil and pumice—scrap the old rose silk hangings for imported velours, cover the parquette flooring with a $3,200 Chinese rug and—well, a few other little items that I forget.

Anyway, he lost the job, not altogether because he was plannin' to blow in as much on one room as would build a fair-sized house, but chiefly on account of the cocky way he turned down one or two timid suggestions of Mrs. Boomer-Day's.

"Why, he was actually rude about it," she explains to Sadie. "Fairly sneered at me. So I just told him I had decided not to have the room done over, after all."

Course, Mrs. Boomer-Day didn't neglect to spread the tale around Rockhurst, and if Roland had counted on pickin' up any local business he was queered from the start. That didn't worry me at all until the bank notified me that the Pottles hadn't come up with the semi-annual interest payment on the mortgage. I told 'em to send another notice

and let it slide for a month or so. Then when I found that the taxes was overdue and the insurance wasn't being kept up I braced myself for a little business call on Roland. I drove down one Saturday afternoon.

After quite a wait between the spindly cedars Mrs. Pottle opened the door. She's costumed simple in a pink smock effect with light green trimmings and I noticed for the first time that she wears her hair boxed. My next jolt is when I steps into the big studio and finds that it's almost as bare of furniture as a theatre lobby. There's a rummy lookin' worm-eaten old oak table in the middle of the room —an antique, I expect—also a couple of odd lookin' high-backed chairs, a marble bench and a five-foot urn-shaped jar with a weird design painted on it. That's about all, though, unless something more was concealed behind the Chinese screen in one corner.

"Ain't movin' out or anything are you?" I asks.

"Oh, no," says Mrs. Pottle.

"Then I take it you ain't quite finished movin' in?" says I.

She laughs easy. "Oh, I see what you mean," says she. "But this is Roland's idea of furnishing an atrium."

"Eh?" says I, gawpin'.

"That's the old Roman name for this sort of a room," she goes on, "an atrium. And Roland says it should be furnished as simply as possible. Useless chairs and tables are his pet aversion, you know. Louis Seize had the same notion. He would

have nothing around him that might detract attention from him. He wished to dominate, if you know what I mean. And Roland—well, that is his idea, too. So——" and she spreads out her hands.

"Huh!" says I. "I must say he's carried it out. Speakin' of Mr. Pottle, though, could I have a talk with him?"

"I—I'll see," says she. "This is his hour of repose but perhaps——"

With that she disappears behind the screen and after some grouchy grunts from him, followed by whispered urgin' from her, she tows him out. He's a picturesque bird when he's first dragged from the nest, I'll say. He's draped in a green silk kimono effect belted in loose with green curtain cord, a pair of sandals on his feet, and his dead black hair fallin' stringy over his pasty forehead.

"Sorry to pry you out of the hay," I begins, "but there's a few little business matters I'd like to take up with you. Now about this interest on the mortgage."

"Oh, that!" says Roland, yawnin'. "Beastly bore, business. I—I will attend to that some time or other when I'm in the proper mood."

"That's encouragin'," says I. "Got any idea when it will strike you? Within the next week or so, eh?"

"Really, I couldn't fix a date," says Roland, lightin' a cigarette dreamy.

"You see," puts in Mrs. Pottle, "Roland is so temperamental."

"That goes in some things," says I, "but not

when it comes to mortgages. Course, I'm no interest hound, but this matter has been runnin' on for some time now. Then there's the taxes and the insurance to be met."

"Oh, I am sure Roland will attend to all those things just as soon as he can make some money," comes in Mrs. Pottle.

"Eh?" says I, prickin' up my ears. "Is that right, Pottle? Does she mean that——"

"Please leave this to me, Vera," says Roland peevish. "The fact is, McCabe, I haven't been able to get some big contracts which I expected to land. Business has been perfectly rotten. When it picks up I will see what I can do for you."

"That's nice," says I, "but a bit vague. However, if you could pay up a couple of hundred on account I might——"

"My dear man," breaks in Roland, "that's utterly impossible. Two hundred dollars! No, I—I—simply haven't got it."

"Why, Roland!" exclaims Vera. "But we had ever so much that Uncle Peter gave me before we——"

"It's gone, though," says Roland. "Do you think I bought that refectory table and that Chinese vase and those Spanish chairs for nothing? Then there have been our living expenses. I haven't dared figure up recently, but I know there can't be much left."

"Then—then we shall just have to call on Uncle Peter," says she.

"I suppose we shall," says he.

"Listens like a good line," says I. "What about Uncle Peter?"

"Oh, he's an impossible old bore," says Roland. "A very crude person, you know. Deals in leather. Wears velvet neck scarfs and a plush hat. Perfectly villainous tastes about everything—art, music, literature, even to what he eats and the way he eats it. Early Victorian. You understand?"

"If he's in leather, though," says I, "his bank rating is apt to be good."

"Oh, he has money," says Roland. "It's perfectly scandalous how much he's made since the war. A million, I suppose."

"Then I should say that in a case like this," and I winks knowin' at Roland, "that Uncle Peter ought to be called in."

"But you—you don't understand," says Vera. "He acted perfectly dreadful when he found I was going to Roland. Didn't he, Rolly, dear?"

And havin' got away to a flyin' start like that, of course they didn't stop until they'd spilled the whole story. At least, enough so it was no trick to patch it together. Seems Vera was an only niece and for a while there a high favorite with Uncle Peter. About his only remainin' relation, in fact. He'd looked after her and brought her up since she was left a double orphan at nine.

Vera had been strong for Uncle Peter, too, until she came back from some flossy girls' boardin' school with a new set of measurements for the male of the species. Then she put the tape on Uncle Peter and discovered that he was a misfit. He was

too broad in the beam and too low in the brow. Also when he hung a napkin over his velvet necktie and inhaled his soup enthusiastic she couldn't help feelin' shuddery along the spine. She discovered that he still stuck to round cuffs and Dick Croker collars, size 16, and that his idea of keepin' up on current events was to read the Shoe and Leather Reporter from cover to cover.

I gathered that it wasn't until Vera got this art bug so hard that livin' on Pineapple street, Brooklyn, under the same roof with Uncle Peter gave her a case of nerves. He took it manful, though, when she announced that if she was ever to follow her career as a sculptress she'd simply have to live her own life in her own way. He went and subleased a studio for her on Washington Square, paid up a year's rent, and gave her a generous monthly allowance.

Then Vera had gone to it with a whoop. Inside of three months she had learned to tackle a 10 A. M. breakfast in bed, light up a cork-tipped dope-stick with her coffee, and as a final touch had acquired a Greenwich Village hair cut. Then she had met Roland. Seems to have been a case from the first fond glance. Anyway, I suspect Roland made no false motions after he heard how Vera had an uncle who wrote rent checks so casual and was particular to keep her bank balance up to a certain figure.

There was one meetin' between Roland and Uncle Peter. Just one. It happened on a Sunday afternoon when Vera arranged to bring 'em together at the Studio and break the news of the coming event.

And never had Vera seen uncle act more like a wholesale leather dealer and less like a gentleman. He had grown red in the face, snorted, pounded the table, used profane language. He had said perfectly awful things to Roland. Right to his face. Also he had told Vera that if she couldn't pick out a better specimen than this to marry she must do it all on her own. He was through. Absolutely. And with that as a farewell shot he had marched out, treading heavy on his heels and leaving Roland wabbly in the knees.

At first they didn't know what to do. Roland was quite upset over the scene. I have a hunch that he was about ready to call it all off, but then Vera pulled the spunky stuff. Why bother about an uncle who could be so crude as that? Let him go hang. Wasn't Roland a genius with a wonderful career ahead of him? They could manage somehow. Didn't she have money in the bank and a whole lot of Liberty bonds and War-Saving Stamps? They'd just go right ahead with the wedding, rent or buy a little place somewhere out in the suburbs, and Roland could start right in as a decorator. And when his fame had spread from Bar Harbor to Pasadena and he was sought out by all the wealthy and great, perhaps Uncle Peter would be sorry. So they had come to Rockhurst, and—well, I knew the rest. They would write to Uncle Peter at once.

"Better put in all the details," I suggests, "about the interest and everything, and how the hard-hearted owner threatens to foreclose."

My guess was that Uncle Peter would simply snort

and toss the letter into the waste basket. That is, if he still remembered Roland. But it was a good chance for me to take. I didn't want to turn 'em out, and I wasn't anxious to get the place back.

I waited a week before droppin' around again and I wasn't surprised to hear that no word had come.

"He may be off on a business trip," suggests Roland. "If you could give us a week or two more——"

"All right," says I. "Call it two."

Then the next day, which was Sunday, I happens to be down to the station with the roadster lookin' for a friend of Sadie's who must have missed her connections or something, and as I'm about to leave I gets the hail from this ruddy-faced, chunky-built old party in the loud-checked suit.

"Say," he demands, "where do the Poodles live out here?"

"Poodles?" says I. "I don't know of any but four-legged ones. You don't mean——"

"No, no!" he breaks in. "Not poodle dogs, though one of 'em is what I'd call a young puppy. Human Poodles. Young married couple. Name's something like that. Or maybe it's Pootle."

"How about Pottle?" says I.

"That's it! Pottle," says he. "He's a lanky, shingle-chested freak with long hair. Lets on to be some kind of an artist."

"Uh-huh!" says I. "Roland Pottle. Some friend of his, are you?"

"I'll be hanged if I am," says he. "I'm his wife's uncle, though."

"Oh, yes!" says I. "Uncle Peter. Climb right in and I'll take you down there. Guess they're kind of lookin' for you."

"Huh!" says he. "They are, are they? Well, we'll see. I've got this far, anyway. No fool like an old one, you know. Swore I'd never go near 'em. He's no earthly good, that Pottle. What Vera could see in him is too much for me. But I used to think a lot of Vera. She—she's all I've got left. Didn't think I'd miss her so much. But I do. Nowhere to go Sunday afternoons. You know. I can stand it through the week. Business. But on Sunday—well, I get lonesome. Must see Vera once more. I hear they're not getting on well financially. I could have told her that. Anyone could, after one look at that Pottle. But she's my niece, all the same. Ought to look 'em up, I suppose."

"I think you'll find the latch-string out," says I.

Wish I could have been in on that reunion, but all I saw of it was a glimpse of Vera as she opens the front door and discovers Uncle Peter examinin' scornful the slim cedars. The affair must have had a happy endin', though, for bright and early Monday mornin' I gets a 'phone call from Roland askin' me snappy if I could stop in soon and go over a little business matter with him. I made it that evenin', and what does he greet me with but a wave-lined blue slip with Uncle Peter's autograph on it under a four-figure amount.

"M-m-m-m!" says I through my teeth. "That's

what I call some uncle. Going to take over the property himself, is he?"

'Oh, yes," says Roland. "It's a mere trifle to him."

"And he's going to do something else for us," adds Vera. "He wouldn't tell me just what, but I'm sure it will be something nice. He's rather an old dear, Uncle Peter."

"I wonder what he's planning, though," says Roland, wrinklin' his pasty brow.

He found out a few days later when a truck load of furniture from a Brooklyn department store backed up, and a lady flat fitter begun bossin' the job of uncratin' the stuff. Course, it was all over by the time I got around to callin' with the deed. I discovers Roland and Vera wanderin' dazed in the midst of this collection of near-mahogany rockers, stuffed easy chairs, onyx-topped tables and so on.

Uncle Peter sure hadn't stinted himself when he did the orderin'. If he'd measured the floor space and then bought enough to cover it he couldn't have made a much closer guess. He'd left mighty little margin for movin' about. Yes, there was all the furniture two people could possibly use, even if they was furniture addicts. As for the color scheme, Uncle Peter hadn't bothered with that. He'd picked a davenport upholstered in bright blue velvet, set it off with a red leather arm chair, and added a willow rocker painted a vivid green. Then for good measure he'd thrown in a couple of big rugs with a sprawly flower design and half a dozen cheerful toned oil paintings in wide gold frames.

"Just look what has happened to our lovely atrium!" moans Vera.

"You could almost hang out the S.R.O. sign, couldn't you?" says I.

"I feel absolutely suffocated among all this rubbish," says Roland. "And look at those awful color combinations. They clash so I can hardly sleep."

"Got to keep it all, have you?" I asks.

"Oh yes," says Vera. "Uncle Peter plans to spend every Sunday with us. And it's his house, you know. He meant well, of course; but did you ever see such wretched taste?"

"I expect he's a good judge of leather," says I. "He looks kind of husky, too; as though he might last quite some time."

"Oh, years and years!" groans Roland. "Meanwhile we shall have to live on with—with this."

Before I left, though, Vera was struck with a brilliant idea. She's kind of bright, in her way. And when she explains it to Roland he almost cheers up.

"That's so!" says he. "We could hang draperies across the studio, about two-thirds of the way back, and pile most of it away every Monday morning. It would be a deuce of a job, though, getting it back again every Saturday."

"The exercise might be just what you need, dear," suggests Vera. "And think of the relief to our nerves and your temperament."

"Yes, I believe it would be worth while," says Roland. "Let's try it now."

And when I left he was struggling to balance the blue davenport on a brass-legged onyx table and a Circassian walnut stand. I'll bet it's the first real work he's tackled in years.

Somehow ever since then, if I'm tempted to indulge in a blue Monday or a sour Saturday, I can always chirk up. All I have to do is to think of Roland and his bi-weekly movin' day. Generally the picture is good for a chuckle.

XVI

LITTLE SULLY SPEAKS UP

I MIGHT never have doped it out if it hadn't been for Miss Fannie. My theory of being a parent, I mean. In fact, I didn't know I had any fixed ideas on the subject until she begun pumpin' 'em out. If you'd asked me before that I expect I'd scratched my head and admitted I was raisin' a fam'ly like I'd play the flute—if I ever got that reckless—by ear.

"Do you know, Professor McCabe," she starts in, "I think your two children are simply wonderful."

"Oh, I don't know as I'd go that far," says I, strugglin' hard to register modesty. "They're both live wires, all right, if that's what you mean."

"But they are such perfect pictures of health and youthful happiness," she gushes on, "and such eager innocence beams from their dear eyes."

"Ye-e-es?" says I. "Glad you think so."

Miss Fannie always had a way of statin' her views enthusiastic, with her foot on the accelerator, you might say, and you couldn't very well doubt but that she meant most of it; at the time, anyhow.

Kind of an interestin' female party, Miss Fannie. Maybe I've mentioned her before. I ain't sure. Sort of a cousin or something of Mrs. Purdy Pell's.

Must have been rather a swell looker when she was young, and now that she's slipped past the forty mark she's making a brave stab at givin' the old boy with the scythe and the sand works' clock a run for his money. Uh-huh! I'll bet there ain't any tricks of the beauty parlor, from henna to anti-wrinkle bandages, that Miss Fannie ain't hep to. And when it comes to drapin' herself in fancy raiment she simply lifts the lid and goes the limit.

I used to wonder how, with her kittenish ways and all, she'd managed to stay Miss Fannie so long. That is, until finally I got the whole story from Sadie. It was a case of her being the older sister and lookin' after an invalid mother and a gouty father while young sister grows up and cops off the one man that Fannie had the net over. It didn't sour her, though. She stuck to the bedside job until both of her patients checked out, and then she woke up to find herself an old maid of thirty-five or so with a stout-plus figure, lines under her eyes, and her brown hair beginnin' to frost up. Also though, she had a generous income, no cares but a pet Pomeranian, and all her future leadin' away from the front steps.

So Miss Fannie proceeds to cut loose. She'd always wanted to travel so she goes to it strong. For a couple of years there her home was Suite B off the promenade deck, or drawing room A in car 137. She flitted from Banff to Bangor, from Loch Lomond to Knights Key, from Port Antonio to Crawford Notch. Then she'd drift back to her old rose and gray duplex apartment on East 60th Street,

unpack the wardrobe trunks, get Beppo out of hock at the kennels, and settle down for another shopping campaign; filling in her spare time by renewing her permanent wave, having her eyebrows revised and hitting up a course of highbrow lectures and Carnegie Hall recitals.

If Miss Fanny had seen more'n her share of dull days when she was young she sure was makin' up for 'em now. So far as I could judge she was havin' one whale of a time, with no hubby to check up her monthly bills critical or grouch about her daily program. What if she did use the face fresco liberal, or toddle around on high French heels? There was nobody to hand out a knock. And any time she got discontented playin' a lone hand all she had to do was drop in on Sister Belle up in Yonkers and listen to her tales about eight-hour cooks, frozen plumbing, and how Jimmy, the ex-net dodger, was carryin' on with some blonde vamp at the Country Club dances.

Spring might have been wet and dreary for Miss Fanny, but her mid-summer days were warm and sunshiny. She was always workin' up new enthusiasms. Her latest seems to be for youngsters and I found out why when she begins to gush about a lecture she's heard recent. It was on Childhood, by the Reverend Percey Van Sump.

"He did put it so beautifully," goes on Miss Fannie, "and said such lovely things about them in the most charming manner. 'The soul's budding time' was one of his phrases, I remember. And then when I recalled that I had not seen your two

little darlings since they were mere babies I simply had to come right over. And I do hope I may have more than a mere glimpse of them."

Course, that line of talk goes big with Sadie. She eats it up. First thing I knew she's asked Miss Fannie to spend the rest of the day with us, and have Sunday dinner with the fam'ly. And when Sadie dashes up to the nursery to fetch little Sister I trails along to remind her that we'd planned an afternoon drive up to Greenwich.

"But Miss Fannie is such a dear," says Sadie.

"Huh!" says I. "With her face enameled up like a bedroom set and——"

"S-s-s-sh!" says Sadie, nudgin' me and glancin' panicky at little Sister, who has stopped puttin' her dollie to bed and is listenin' with both ears.

You know that's one of the things we have to be careful about at our house—saying things before little Sister. Not that she means to make trouble or let you in bad with callers. Anyway, I never could believe she did. Them big blue eyes are innocent lookin', as Miss Fannie says. But they're mighty observin' too; and when it comes to stretchin' an ear—say, that little seven-year-old has got a dictaphone lookin' as useless as a cow-catcher on an airplane.

The worst of it is, though, that little Sister is such a free and casual converser. Specially with strangers. Nothing shy or self-conscious about her. No hidin' her head in mother's lap, or peekin' around corners. Not much. Little Sister's way is to give 'em the slow and careful once-over, from

boots to bonnet, then look 'em square in the eye and maybe unload some personal remark, flatterin' or otherwise, but generally otherwise. And it's apt to come out so unexpected. Like what she sprung on Mrs. Boomer-Day once when that billowy party was urgin' little Sister to climb up in her lap and be folksy.

"No," says little Sister. "I don't see much lap. But you got a lot of chins, ain't you?"

And I remembered havin' commented on the lady's chin surplus only the day before. Little Sister had simply picked up the remark and stowed it away, like a whiskered Red would hoard up a stray hand grenade, to use with much the same effect. Oh yes, I admit a habit like that ought to be discouraged. Maybe we ain't tried too, explainin' how it wasn't nice for little girls to say everything they happened to think.

"But I don't," says little Sister. "Couldn't I think such lots and lots of things."

I expect she does. Seems to be that kind. Sometimes for hours you won't hear a word from her, but when she does cut loose it's generally straight from the shoulder. So no wonder Sadie is worried about my droppin' this careless remark, comparin' Miss Fannie's face to a bedroom set. We edges out and holds a consultation.

"Maybe she didn't catch it," I suggests.

"Oh, I'm sure she did," says Sadie. "I can tell by the way she was holding her head."

"But she couldn't know who it was meant for," says I.

"She would guess," says Sadie.

Then we debated whether it would be best to warn little Sister that a nice lady was going to stay for dinner and she mustn't mention anything about her high face colorin', or if we should try to buy her off with two plates of ice cream. As either scheme would take more or less time and diplomacy we decides just to let it ride and watch out.

That was a poor hunch. From the minute little Sister got settled at the table she hardly took her eyes off Miss Fannie's face, studyin' her deliberate and thorough but not lettin' out a word. And all the while I was tryin' to decide what I'd do if she started to make a break. Should I drop a plate, or grab little Sister and rush out pretendin' she had a bone in her throat? I don't know what was runnin' through Sadie's mind, but I could see she was gettin' nervous.

As for Miss Fannie, she gushes on, first about little Sister and then about Sully. "Such a dear little girl," says she, "and such a sweet manly little fellow! As the Reverend Percey Van Sump so truly says, 'Ah, to know once more the untroubled joy of childhood! To live over again those long calm days of perfect happiness.' If we only could, Mr. McCabe!"

"Eh?" says I, tearin' my eyes from little Sister a second. "Oh, yes. Well, that is, some might like it. As for me, I can't say I would."

"But surely, Mr. McCabe," she protests, "you were far happier as a child than you can ever be now."

I shakes my head. Anybody who starts gushin' always taps my stubborn streak. "No," says I, "I don't think so. As I remember it I was always gettin' into some scrape or other. If it wasn't with the cops on the street it was the old man at home, or else with the gang in the next block. Mostly I was scrappin' with somebody, and generally gettin' licked."

"But think of your happy schooldays," insists Miss Fannie.

"I'd rather not," says I. "I didn't get much fun out of fractions, or drawin' maps of Africa, or tryin' to remember the different kinds of verbs. All them things seemed like so many useless puzzles invented to keep your head muddled. And generally the teachers were such old crabs. They'd get me up before forty or fifty other kids and make a show of me. Say, even now if you'd ask me quick what's the capital of Indiana, or how to spell pneumonia, I'd get thick in the tongue and shivery down the back. And as for them examinations they used to give us to see whether we'd get promoted or stay in the same room another term—say, I ain't had any nightmares since that were as bad. Course, I might have been different from others. Maybe the general run of youngsters have long calm days of perfect happiness. But I didn't."

Miss Fannie won't have it that way, though. "Ah, but one forgets," says she. "One fails to take into account that freedom from care and responsibility that only children have. Your own little boy,

for instance. See how free he is from the little worries and anxieties which fret us grown-ups."

"How about that, eh, Sully?" says I, glancin' across to where our son and heir is tryin' to swipe a piece of frostin' that's flaked off little Sister's hunk of cake and gettin' caught in the act.

"Aw, she don't like frostin' much anyhow," protests Sully, not quite gettin' the drift of the conversation.

I'd noticed before that he hadn't waded into his Sunday dinner with his usual husky appetite and I'd wondered why he was fidgetin' in his chair. And now when he goes through these uneasy motions and is so quick to put up a defense for something he ain't been accused of, I sort of keeps my eye on him. All I could make out though is that he's watchin' the front driveway that he can see through the dinin' room window.

While I was puzzlin' over this I clean forgot about little Sister, so when she pipes up sudden with, "I say, Pop," I simply gives her the go-ahead signal careless. And the next thing I know she's started to unload what's been on her mind so long.

"Which bedroom set, Pop?" she demands.

"Eh?" says I, gawpin' and tryin' to guess why Sadie is shakin' her head so emphatic.

But when little Sister starts trailin' down information, she ain't squelched so easy. "I mean," says she, "the one you said she was——"

"Shorty!" breaks in Sadie just in the nick of time. "Wasn't that the Boomer-Day's limousine that just drove in?"

"I didn't notice," says I. "Was it, Sully?"

"Ye-e-e-s, sir," says he, kind of gaspy, at the same time pushin' away his half-finished plate of ice cream and startin' to get up.

"Well, you don't have to go," says I. "What's the idea?"

"I—I thought I'd go up to my room," says Sully. "I—I don't feel so well."

"Oh, all right," says I. "Sister, you might run along up to the nursery, too. Yes, you can take your cake with you." And I'll bet Sadie was more or less relieved that the discussion about bedroom sets had been postponed.

But a more serious subject than that was waitin' to be sprung on us in the livin' room. For Mrs. Boomer-Day was there, with her darling son Harold. And Harold looked a good deal the worse for wear. He's a tall, slim, pasty-faced youngster, a couple of years older than Sully, and since he's graduated from short pants he gets himself up to look like a young sport. That is, as much as he can. Just now though he's wearin' a lump on the left side of his pallid brow and his right eye is tinted up in shades of blue and purple.

"Why," exclaims Sadie, "whatever has happened to Harold?"

Mrs. Boomer-Day heaves her heavy shoulders tragic and announces stern "This, Mrs. McCabe, is the work of your son."

"Sully!" gasps Sadie. "Do—do you mean that those two boys have been fighting again?"

"I should hardly call it a fight," says Mrs.

Boomer-Day. "Harold was waylaid just at dusk last night on his way home by a gang of village boys and beaten cruelly. The gang was under the leadership of your son. Harold is quite sure of that. He says it was Sully who struck him first."

"Why—why, this is dreadful!" groans Sadie. "Shorty, what do you think of that?"

"Listens bad," says I. "That's why he was so nervous at dinner, then."

"Sully must be punished severely for this," says Sadie. "I hope you will attend to it right away, Shorty."

"Sure," says I. "That is, if it's all so."

"But you have my word, Mr. McCabe," says Mrs. Boomer-Day, tossin' two or three of her chins haughty.

"Excuse me," says I, "but as I understand it we have your word for Harold's account of the affair, that's all."

"I should like you to understand, Mr. McCabe," says the lady, "that I have the utmost confidence in Harold's truthfulness."

"Yes, I expect you have," says I. "Most mothers do. But let's see: Harold came home from prep. school last month by request of the faculty, didn't he? And I expect he told you all about why they turned him loose?"

"Certainly he did," says Mrs. Boomer-Day defiant.

"Did it tally with the letter you got from the head master?" I asks.

"The head master was quite unjust," says she.

"He was influenced by some of the instructors who were jealous of Harold's popularity."

"Oh, it was that way, was it?" says I. "But wasn't this the third school that Harold has been——"

"I fail to see what that has to do with the present case," says Mrs. Boomer-Day. "Harold has been brutally assaulted by your son. Let us stick to that, please."

"Very well," says I. "Does Harold give any reason why Sully should do a thing like that?"

"He says there was no cause whatever," says she.

I shakes my head dubious. "Got to break him of that," says I. "Maybe, though, he's got some alibi of his own. Suppose we get him down here?"

Mrs. Boomer-Day can't see the use, but I insists on Sadie's leadin' the young villain on the carpet and we opens court.

"Did you do it, Sully?" says I, noddin' to Harold.

He hangs his head and grunts out something that sounds like "Uh-huh."

"There!" says Mrs. Boomer-Day triumphant.

"What for?" I demands.

"I—I don't wanna say," mumbles Sully.

"Huh!" sneers Harold. "You've got nothing to tell, that's why."

"Shut up!" says Sully, starin' at him hostile.

"Here, here!" says I. "None of that rough stuff. You've got one more chance, Sully, to say anything you want to."

"All right," says Sully. "I'll tell it all, then."

"You—you wouldn't dare," puts in Harold husky.

"Wouldn't I?" says Sully, bracin' his shoulders.

It was a harrowin' tale for a Sunday afternoon; all about how Harold had come hangin' around where the gang met and had finally been allowed to explain the mysteries of crap shootin' to 'em. One or two had rolled the bones some, but most of the crowd was raw amateurs. They took to the game fast enough, though, and was kind of enjoyin' it until they got wise to the fact that Harold was collectin' their spendin' money monotonous.

Sully admits that he not only blew in all his weekly allowance but had tapped his dime savin's bank, sold his Christmas camera, and borrowed a couple of quarters off Selma, the maid. He didn't know where some of the others got all the cash they lost but he'd heard that young Feltner got a lickin' for gettin' caught foolin' with the cash drawer in his dad's shoe store.

"How long has this been going on?" I asks.

Sully says about three weeks.

"And Harold was generally the big winner, eh?" says I. "How was that? Couldn't the rest of you get 'em to rollin' for you some of the time?"

"Ah, he had a set of phony bones," says Sully. "We caught him with 'em Sat-day mornin'."

"It's a lie!" breaks in Harold indignant.

"We'll hope so," says I. "But let's see, son; wasn't it for crap shootin' that you was released from three prep. schools?"

"I was only looking on," says Harold. "I didn't play."

"Aw, he's always rollin' 'em," protests Sully. "Carries the bones around with him everywhere. I'll bet he's got 'em now."

But I saw that right hand of his sort of drop back to his hip pocket so I makes a sudden grab and before he can duck I've got him by the collar and have fished out the ivory cubes.

"Well, well!" says I. "The little spotted bones. Nice, expensive lookin' ones, too. Stand still, Harold, until we see how they behave when they get a careless toss. A seven first roll! Now again. And here's a lucky eleven! Say, young man, no wonder you cleaned out the bunch. And I don't know as I blame 'em much for being sore. Strikes me you got about what was comin' to you. I'll just keep these, Harold. If they was found on you you'd stand a good chance of seein' the inside of a jail."

"Wha-a-at!" gasps Mrs. Boomer-Day.

"Fact, ma'am," says I. "Carryin' loaded dice is a penal offense. And it's a bad habit to monkey with 'em at all, as I'm goin' to explain, if I can, to little Sully. So suppose we just call it that the case of Harold versus Sully is dismissed, eh?"

She ain't enthusiastic about endorsin' the verdict but she takes her darling Harold by the hand and marches him towards the limousine. At that, though, I'll bet he lied out of it. Harold usually does.

And when we gets back to Miss Fannie and our coffee in the libr'y, I finds she's had time to re-

member another lovely thing that the Reverend Percey Van Sump got off.

"It must be so interesting," says she, "to watch the development of an innocent human soul. It is like the unfolding petal by petal, of a flower, is it not?"

"Well, maybe at times it might be," says I, "and then again——"

I might have said something real brilliant only right there I happens to glance at the door and finds little Sister starin' through the draperies straight at Miss Fannie. I knew what that meant. She'd remembered that I hadn't told her which bedroom set.

"Excuse me," says I. "I think little Sister wants to ask me a question in private."

XVII

A LITTLE LATE FOR OMAR

TAKE it from me, these parties who are always pullin' that comedy line about the well-known human race are all wrong. They may think they know, but they don't. The unknown human race would be a lot nearer.

Which is enough of a curtain raiser maybe, for the tale of how I paid a professional call, here the other afternoon, on H. Milton Burch. Not that my cards read "Physical Culture, Taken In and Going Out." Mostly I stick to the studio, where I have all the apparatus for treatin' plutes whose livers have turned Bolshevik. But now and then, in special cases and at special rates, I pack a medicine ball and a set of kid mitts in a kit bag and go chase my job, like a plumber or a piano tuner.

It was my friend Pinckney, you might know, who steered me up against this Burch person and urges me to give him private sessions when I was all for turnin' him down.

"Who is he," I asks, "that he can't come to the Studio and mix with the common herd of brokers and bank presidents?"

"If I must confess it, Shorty," says Pinckney, "he is my Uncle Henry. Not a real uncle, you

know. I acquired him by marriage. And he has otherwise achieved fame, and incidentally fortune, by manufacturing brass beds in perfectly scandalous quantities.''

''Eh?'' says I. ''He's the Burch's brass beds man, is he?''

''Such he is,'' says Pinckney, ''although we seldom mention the fact outside of the family circle. But he's an inoffensive old boy aside from his glittering bedroom atrocities. And I understand he did not originate the brass bed idea. It was the barbarous notion of a German factory foreman who was promptly discharged for trying the experiment. But before the lot could be white enameled a perverted furniture buyer for a Brooklyn instalment firm had purchased the whole two hundred and put them on the market. Well, you know what happened. The brass bed epidemic broke out and swept the entire world. Think of it, Shorty! A nation which had already inflicted the telephone and the penny-in-the-slot gum machine on humanity now added to the horrors of living—and dying—the brass bed. They invaded a million homes here, and then swept on until in the peaceful isles of the far seas no humble hut was without this blatant token of our wretched taste. And, of course, Uncle Henry became vulgarly wealthy. 'Buy One of Burch's Brass Beds' came to be an international slogan, and while he sold out to a trust during the height of the craze, he has never been able to live down the evil fame which his advertising agents fastened on him. So do not judge him too harshly,

Shorty. Go up to his sixteen-room-four-baths apartment and show him how to conquer his gout or his insomnia or whatever it is that poor Uncle Henry thinks is the matter with him."

"It's going to put a crimp in his daily income if I do," says I.

"Oh, I have quite prepared him for that," says Pinckney. "Charge him the limit, just as if you were making out a cost-plus bill on a government contract."

"Thanks for the hunch, Pinckney," says I. "In cases like this I always try to do 'em good."

So at 2:15 a taxi unloads me between the tubbed cedars of the inner court and an elevator takes me up to the ninth floor. If I hadn't seen so many of these so-called captains of industry I expect I'd have been some disappointed in H. Milton Burch. But as a rule they ain't much to look at. Brass Bed Burch is about as unimpressive as most of 'em. Not that there ain't enough of him, for he's a sizable old boy. But in spite of his five foot ten, and his wide shoulders and his heavy growth of facial shrubbery, he don't register very strong with me. Somehow I wouldn't pick him out as a human dynamo. Maybe it's them shifty eyes, or the hint of a weak chin under the crisp curly whiskers.

I finds him camped behind a big mahogany desk with a tall vase of hot-house roses on one corner and a smirky, white necktied private secretary at his elbow.

"Ah, Professor McCabe!" says he. "Punctual to the minute! That's good, very good. Now if

you'll pardon me for one moment while I finish a little business. Ah, thank you. All right, Dodson. You may send out those checks which I have signed. And you may say that I will add further donations if necessary. Your little note to the press sounds rather satisfactory. See that a copy goes to all the papers and save the clippings for me, as usual. That is all for today, Dodson, I think. Now, Professor."

"Well, what'll it be?" says I. "A few rounds with the gloves, eh?"

"Boxing?" says H. Milton. "Oh, I fear I'm not in condition to go in for anything so violent."

"You look husky enough to me," says I. "Nothing like swapping punches to get lathered up quick."

He won't listen to it though. No, he insists that he's almost an invalid. In fact, I discovers that what H. Milton Burch wants to do most is to tell me about his little aches and pains. Almost had me buffaloed about 'em, too, until I goes over him thorough, finds that his blood pump is workin' as reg'lar as a clock, that his breathin' is good, and so on.

But I've seen lots of 'em that way. When they haven't much to do but fuss about themselves they get to workin' up all kinds of suspicions.

"Huh!" says I. "Little soft, that's all, and maybe you've been eatin' too hearty. About all you need is——"

I was on the point of spillin' some sound advice and prescribin' a course of gym. stunts that would cost him around five dollars a minute, when this

young riot breaks out in the private hallway. I could hear both the butler and Dodson protestin' to somebody that Mr. Burch was engaged, but above their chatter rings out this cheery, high-pitched voice.

"Oh, that'll be all right, too," the stranger is sayin'. "One side, fellows! Make way for the Caliph of Cornell."

And with that in shuffles a tall, slim, battered specimen wearin' baggy pants, a shiny frock coat of the McKinley period, and wavin' a dusty, wide-brimmed black Stetson that has had ventilatin' holes let into the crown either by a hungry goat or an accurate sharp-shooter. The gent has kind of an interestin' face, though. One that you'd remember, anyway; chiefly on account of the long nose, the strawb'ry-pink complexion and the generous cut mouth with the quizzin' smile playin' tag in the corners.

"Well, well!" says he, starin' at Mr. Burch. "By the soul of old Omar, if it isn't Hank, grown up and bearded like a pard. Know me, don't you, Hank?"

"I fear I have not that pleasure," says H. Milton, glancin' at him nervous.

"Who else, Hank," he goes on, "would come as the Caliph of Cornell but your old room-mate, Bill Coogler?"

"Wha-a-at! Coogler?" gasps H. Milton.

And if Bill had been plannin' to hand him a bunch of good news with that statement I judged that somehow he'd missed the mark. Hank don't warm up a bit.

"I suppose you know what brings me on the scene; eh, Hank?" says Bill, winkin' suggestive.

"No," says Burch, cold and distant. "And if you will permit me, Coogler, it would be more convenient to hear your errand at some other——"

"Oh, come, Hank!" breaks in Bill. "That's not living up to the terms of the Pythian pact, you know."

"The—the pact?" says Hank, breathin' it out husky. "Oh, that school-boy nonsense!"

"Hank, I am pained and surprised," says Bill. "You didn't think it was nonsense when you signed it in blood. Did you, now? Maybe you imagine I haven't my copy. I have, though. Right here," and he proceeds to dig up an old leather bill fold out of which he produces this creased and yellowed piece of paper. "See?" and he waves it under Burch's nose.

Hank shrugs his shoulders. "Absurd!" says he.

"Suppose we submit the case to a third party, then?" suggests Coogler. "Anybody. Your friend here," and he nods to me.

That seems to strike H. Milton as an easy way out. Maybe he thought I'd agree with him. "Very well," says he, "we will leave it to Professor McCabe. But you must allow me to state the facts in my own way."

"Shoot," says Bill. "I'll prompt you if you stub your toe."

"It was one of those silly college-boy agreements," goes on Burch. "There were three of us. Wesley Deake was the other. We had been reading

the 'Rubaiyat.' Not that any of us was particularly fond of poetry, but those old Persian verses were being talked of a good deal just then, and I imagine we thought it rather smart to quote the stuff. The translator's story of the life of the old Tent Maker did have a certain appeal to us, however. We were three friends. Called ourselves Fabians Three, or The Stick Togethers. And one day, in imitation of Omar and his two friends, we wrote out this so-called Pythian pact in which we agreed that if any one of us ever became great or wealthy the other two should have an equal share whenever they came to claim it. An utterly impractical scheme, as you see. Eh, McCabe?"

"If I'm goin' to referee the case," says I, "I expect I ought to hear both sides. How about it, Mr. Coogler? Got anything to add?"

"A lot," says Coogler. "We meant it, every one of us. We intended to stick to it. As a matter of fact, Hank was the most enthusiastic of the three. Looked like a cinch that he stood to win, for he was the bonehead of the trio. Oh, yes you were, Hank. You sort of trailed around after Wes. and me. We were the leading spirits. You were both certain that I was a budding genius. I could write verses, draw caricatures, play the guitar and sing all the popular songs. And Wesley—we were fairly sure that Wes. was going to be a rich man. Wasn't his father a banker? While you, Hank, had neither prospects nor talent. Spent your vacations working in a foundry, didn't you?"

Burch nods. "It was that experience which laid the foundations of my fortune," says he.

"Think of it!" says Bill. "Old Hungry Hank turning out a multi-millionaire, while I"—he twirls the dusty Stetson on a long forefinger.

"What have you been doing all these years?" asks Burch, gazin' at him curious.

"Oh, going to and fro in the world and walking up and down in it," says Bill, springin' that quizzin' smile. "A little of everything, from writing for the daily press to traveling with a medicine top. I have sung in church choirs for the fun of it, and I have dealt faro for a fixed salary. I was with Leonard Wood in Cuba when he cleaned up Havana, and I went into Dawson City with Sweetwater Bill the year of the big placer strikes. Some of the enterprises in which I have taken a hand I had rather not go into details about. A few were highly profitable for a time, more were quite the reverse, but all were interesting. I regret not a one. As for my present state—— Well, you can guess. As Omar put it so well—

> "'I've drowned my Glory in a shallow cup
> And sold my Reputation for a song.'"

"Drink?" suggests Burch.

"Why phrase it so crudely?" protests Bill. "You remember that immortal alibi—

> "'Oh Thou, who didst with pitfall and with gin
> Beset the road I was to wander in——'

"Well, why blame me? 'What did the hand then of the Potter shake?' Anyway, I've had my share. That is, up to date. For the last year, however, my

clay with long oblivion has gone dry. In other words, Hank, I have suffered from the general aridity which has settled upon what Mike Slattery, a friend of mine, down in Dallas, calls the great O'Hara desert."

He was a fluent cuss, Bill Coogler, and more or less entertainin' to listen to. Also he seems as much at home in that swell apartment, movin' around over the Eastern rugs and droppin' easy into a deep-cushioned armchair, as if he'd been holdin' forth in a Bowery lodgin' house. H. Milton Burch has recovered some from his fidgets and is gazin' at him sort of reminiscent.

"Same old Bill, aren't you?" he remarks. "How did you happen to find out that I was here?"

"Simply by reading the newspapers, Hank," says Coogler. "Your goings and comings are fairly well advertised, you know. Must have a good press agent. And when I read that little human interest story about how you had come forward so nobly to the aid of that unfortunate young artist who had collapsed from hunger while working as a street cleaner—well, thinks I, if Hank has reached the point where he writes checks for total strangers the time is ripe for me to cash in on that Pythian pact. Now don't shudder, my dear Hank. I am not one to insist on my pound of flesh, nor shall I demand one-third of all your worldly goods. You will find me a reasonable person."

"Ah!" says Burch, sighin' relieved. "But just what do you propose to ask?"

"Merely a loaf of bread beneath the bough,

Hank," says Bill, "a flask of wine, a book of verse, and Thou. We will omit the singing; for, as I remember, Hank, your singing wasn't much. I will supply the musical interludes if you'll furnish the rest."

"In more concrete and less poetical terms, however," suggests Burch.

"Board, lodging and raiment," says Bill. "Plenty of room here for two more, I should say," and he glances around at the various doors openin' off the big livin' room.

"Two more?" echoes Hank.

"Couldn't leave out Wesley Deake, could we?" says Coogler. "He's in town, you know. Oh, yes! Running a second-hand furniture shop over on Eighth avenue. I haven't seen him personally, but I looked him up in the directory and telephoned him to meet me here on business of importance. He's late, as usual, but he ought to be here——"

"A Mr. Deake to see you, sir," whispers the butler, tiptoein' in.

"Eh?" says Burch. "Deake. Well, show him in. Might as well."

He ain't quite so seedy lookin' as Bill Coogler, but he's no mirror of fashion. A heavy set, poddy, round-shouldered party with grizzly gray hair, scowlin' brows and bags under his eyes. He stares around the group cold and suspicious, and even after he's been notified hilarious by Coogler that once more the Fabians Three are met together he don't seem to get the spirit of the reunion.

"What's the idea?" he demands.

"This!" says Bill, wavin' the creased yellow paper at him. "We are met to carry out the terms of the Pythian Pact."

"Huh!" snorts Mr. Deake.

"Not so scornful, Wesley," protests Coogler. "It is quite simple. Here is our old friend Hank, rolling in luxury and wrapped in power. We come to bask in the sunshine of his good fortune, as he would have come to either of us had the gift been ours."

"Whaddye mean, bask?" says Wesley.

"Well, to make it more direct," says Coogler, "I propose that we give up our several and unfruitful pursuits and join Hank in enjoying the good things of life. You're a widower, aren't you, Wes., and alone in the world?"

Wesley nods.

"So is Hank," goes on Coogler. "Neither chick nor child, and an income from brass beds that he doesn't know how to spend. We'll help. And what glorious times we'll have, recalling those golden days of youth when our ambitions rode the fleecy summer cloud and we pooled our last coins to provide the ingredients for a midnight rarebit in the old dormitory. Remember those forbidden orgies, eh, Wes.?"

Evidently Wesley Deake did, for his cold eyes lit up a bit.

"What about Hank?" he asks. "Does he stand for it?"

"That matter is now before the court," says Bill, wavin' to me. "Professor McCabe has kindly consented to decide if our claim is a just one or not. Well, Professor?"

Course, it sounds foolish enough, but I couldn't resist puttin' it up to H. Milton. "I don't see how he can renig if he admits signin' the paper," says I.

"What!" says Burch.

"There you are!" chimes in Bill Coogler triumphant. "A wise judge! A most righteous judge! As for me, I am ready to begin now, at once. How are you fixed, Wes.? Got to go back and lock up the store, or anything?"

"It's locked," says Wesley.

"Then we're all set," says Bill. "And think what a story that will make for the morning papers, Hank. Let me sketch out the headlines for you. 'A Modern Fabian. Generous Millionaire Lives Up to Boyhood Pact. Fabians Three Find Each Other in New York and Fortunate One Shares with Unlucky Twain.' Eh, Hank? How will that look on the first page?"

Whether he knew it or not, Bill Coogler had got to Hank in his soft spot. I could tell that by the sentimental flicker in H. Milton's eyes. For a minute he sets there sort of smilin' to himself. Then he rouses up sudden and slaps his knee.

"By George, boys, you're right!" says he. "I have been rather lonely, for all my money. Haven't realized it, either. No congenial companionship. And here you are, old friends of my youth. We will begin right where we left off, years ago. What if we are but Sultans to the realm of Death addrest? We'll make the most of what is left of the journey. We will eat and make merry."

"Don't forget the jug of wine!" urges Bill.

"Oh, as for that," says Hank, shrugging his shoulders, "of course, that's impossible now. But the other things—well, you shall lack neither loaf nor raiment. I say, .Dodson! Let us have tea served for three at once. Tea with all the trimmings, mind you. And 'phone my tailor to send a fitter up here, will you? And—er—you may notify the reporters that if they will come to see me about 8:30 I may have something of interest to communicate. And about those physical culture exercises of ours, Professor McCabe; suppose we postpone them for a few days. I—ah—I'm not sure that I shall need them, after all."

"My guess is that you won't," says I, backin' out with a grin.

Say, I expect you saw the papers. Hank made the first page, all right. He got more space than the latest cabinet row or the railroad strike. And them group pictures of the Fabians, with Bill Coogler in a sporty checked suit and a polo coat, and Wes. Deake minus his shaggy hair and wearin' a silk lid, sure was a scream. I cut one out and have it pinned up on the wall.

All the week I've been wishin' H. Milton would send for me again so I could see how the baskin' process was comin' on. But never a word.

And here yesterday, as I'm strollin' across Forty-second street, I comes across this tall party in the polo coat who's makin' for the Grand Central station. It's Bill Coogler.

"What's this mean?" says I. "A stray Fabian

scoutin' along by his lonesome! Where are the other two?"

"Don't ask me," says Bill. "All I know is that I've quit. I'm headed for Texas."

"Then the reunion is over?" says I.

"Absolutely," says Bill. "In the words of Omar, Tamam Shud. Finished."

"But why?" I asks.

"We couldn't stand Hank Burch, that's all," says Bill. "I should have known it. He was bad enough at nineteen, when he was simply thick in the head. But at fifty-five—well, he has developed into a sentimental old bore. And an old hypocrite as well. Swore to us he didn't have even a pint of private stock. But he did. We caught him taking it on the sly—and out of a spoon! I could forgive a man who would lock up good liquor away from his old friends. That's only natural. But to insult old rye by spooning it in—say, I should lose all my self-respect by associating with such a person. So I'm going back down on the border, where a little aguardiente trickles in now and then."

"How about Wesley?" says I.

"Oh, him!" says Bill. "He went back to his second-hand furniture store yesterday. He's got to be such an old grouch that he couldn't get along with anybody." With which Bill hurries off.

Uh-huh! I guess I'm nearer right than the humorists. It's the unknown human race to most of us, in spite of all the chances we have of gettin' acquainted.

XVIII

WISH DAY WITH SHORTY

SAY, with a little more practice I believe I can put this Foster person out of business. You know, the one you ask when you want to know how to get from Kokomo to Kalamuk, or what's the worst hotel in Boardwalk-by-the-Sea. Only my line might be a little different. Yea-uh! First thing you know there'll be signs up in the drug stores and waitin' rooms readin': "What do you want most? Ask Shorty McCabe."

Anyway, I'm buildin' up a rep. here at home. With certain parties I rate almost as good as a he-fairy with a magic wand. And it all happens casual and offhand, without my hardly knowin' I was pullin' anything out of the ordinary. It's a gift, I expect, like wigglin' your ears or playin' the snare drum.

First off, there was Dominick Salvatore. We've been friends and neighbors, me and Dominick, ever since I moved out here to Rockhurst. Sure, he's just a Dago, but there's a lot of folks who don't smell so strong of garlic that I would miss less than I would him. A lot who ain't near so useful to the community, too.

Among other activities, Dominick is our ash and

garbage collector. Does it prompt and faithful, as a rule. Course, now and then he slips up like the rest of us. Here a while back, when the weather was so bad, he didn't show up for near a week, and when he did come around one mornin' I was handin' him the playful roast.

"Where you been, Dominick?" I asks. "Indulgin' in a double header christenin' party, or off settlin' the Fiume question, eh?"

"No," says he, shruggin' his shoulders eloquent. "Pietro, she bada seeck in heem front leg."

"That so?" says I, inspectin' the old white horse that has his knees draped picturesque in gunny-sackin'. "Spavined, or what?"

"I dunno," says Dominick. "Pierto, she no good las' five or seven year. Except for eat oats an' hay. Eat hees fool head off. I weesh——" Here Dominick shakes his head discouraged.

"Well, what is it you wish?" says I. "Let's hear."

"I weesh I had truck fliv," says Dominick. "Da benzina much cheap as da oat, an' when you no drive fliv he not eat."

"Yes, I've heard something like that stated before," says I. "Then why don't you loosen up, you Napoli tight-wad, and buy one?"

"Too much," says Dominick. "Some time I find secon' han' one at bargain. Weesh I find heem quick."

"Huh!" says I. "I'll put your wish on record, Dominick."

Which we'll submit as exhibit 1. No. 2 had to

do with Feltner, the baker. I'd dropped in there, on my way to the station, to order some fancy cakes for a tea Mrs. McCabe was giving, and I finds him with his elbows on the counter, his chin in his hands and a gloomy look on his face.

"I know," says I. "You're tryin to register sorrow at havin' to cut your twelve ounce loaf to ten. That it?"

"Who tell you so, Professor McCabe," says he, starin' indignant, "iss one big liar. Here, on the scales now, I show you. There! Better bread, too, as you get at the grocer's from Newark."

"I'll have to take your word for it, Feltner," says I. "But why wear a face like an ex-barkeep mixin' a malted milk shake for an old customer who used to take his straight with a dash of gum in the bottom? Come, what's your private grief?"

"I was just wishin', Professor," says he.

"Eh?" says I. "Another who could be happy if he had what he wanted when he wants it! Well, let's hear your wish."

"You would make a joke of me," says he, shakin' his head.

"Maybe," says I. "But a stifled wish is bad to keep on your chest. Go on, I'm making a collection of 'em this mornin'. What is it you want most?"

"It's not so much for me," says Feltner, glancin' cautious toward the back room, "as for Rosie. It's one of them cabinet music machines—all mahogany, with a lot of records, grand op'ra, dance tunes and violin pieces. She's been teasin' for one ever since she gets out of high school. And now, with the

fellers comin' around evenin's, she says she is 'shamed for not havin' one. She says all the other girls have 'em, and they can dance with their fellers to home, and learn all them shiver steps. It would be nice Sundays for me, too, when I could smoke my pipe and listen to fine music. But——" and he hunches his shoulders.

"Yes," says I. "They do cost a lot nowdays. Gone up, like everything. Still, I expect Rosie can get along without one. She ain't so hard to look at, and some nice young fellow will forgive her for not springin' the Blooey Blues on him when he comes around.

"She's a good girl, Rosie," goes on Feltner, "and when you got only one—well, you know. I wish——"

"Check!" says I. "It's on file. One cabinet vicronola. But don't forget them frosted drop cakes."

Then ten minutes later I happens to camp down in the smokin' car of the Commuter's express alongside of Mr. H. Boomer-Day, who admits being one of our plutiest plutes, all except when he's swearin' off his personal tax assessment. And hanged if he ain't goin' through peevish motions with his mornin' paper.

"Eh?" says I. "Has that man Wilson been givin' off more views that don't ride well with you?"

"Not since day before yesterday," says Boomer-Day.

"Oh!" says I. "Then some fool society reporter must have been printin' your wife's name wrong again. Did they get it Roomer-Day this time, or Boomer-Jay?"

He shakes his head. "Mabel's new social secretary is attending to all that now," says he. "This is rather a personal affair, something that has been left to me to arrange and I've rather neglected it."

"I wasn't tryin' to horn in," says I.

"Certainly not," says he. "It's no family secret. In fact, McCabe, while it may seem to you a trivial matter, I am much disturbed over my negligence. You see, we are giving rather an important dinner party tomorrow night—for the Count and Countess Barzoni—and Mrs. Boomer-Day had planned that a feature of the affair should be something unique in the way of a centerpiece for the table. I was to have seen our florist last week and given the order. I forgot all about it until yesterday and when I dropped in I found that all his best decorators were busy with weddings and dinners and he couldn't offer a thing but a gold-fish pool or some other shop-worn device. Mabel is quite disappointed. We—we had a talk about it at breakfast."

"Yes, I expect you did," says I, grinnin'.

If you'd ever seen Mabel, or heard her express herself, you'd have grinned, too. She's quite a sizable girl, Mabel. What you might call an eye-full. And Boomer-Day wears a 14 collar and 29-30 pants. I should picture that little chat over the coffee cups, with Mabel doin' most of the chattin' and Boomer-Day the heavy end of the listenin'.

"Rather stupid of me," he admits. "And really, I wish——"

"Say, that's what they're all doin' today," I breaks in. "But I didn't expect it from you. Why,

I thought you would be one party that had everything he wanted."

"Does anyone?" he asks. "True, I have been fortunate in most things, but in this instance—well, you can understand. I was awake for hours last night, trying to think of something novel in the line of centre-pieces. It—it is rather expected of us. And then, with such guests as the Count and Countess, who entertained us so lavishly at their villa in Italy——"

"Yes," says I, "it must be heart-breakin' to have to fall back on mere gold-fish. Couldn't you stripe 'em with the Italian national colors, or get some that stand on their tails and beg for olives?"

Boomer-Day simply stares at me disgusted. He's got about as much sense of humor as there is sap in a brick.

"But really, McCabe," he goes on, "I wish——"

"Got you!" says I. "And it's all rung up on the register. Excuse me, though. There's a party I want to see."

And from then until I drifts into the Physical Culture Studio about 9:05 I manages to duck listenin' to people with consumin' ambitions and unsatisfied longin's. I discovers Swifty Joe gazin' pensive out of an open front window into Forty-second street where the first warm sunshine of spring is filterin' down between the tall buildings.

"Say, Shorty," he remarks as I drop into the swing chair in front of the roll-top, "I wish——"

"Then scuttle it," says I. "Anyway, don't wish your wishes on me. I've got a full cargo. Say,

anybody'd think the Mayor had declared this a Make-a-Wish Day, and that I'd been appointed chairman of the judgin' committee. But I'm happy to state it ain't so. My advice is, Swifty, be contented with what you got and don't make any fool wishes."

"Ahr-chee!" says Swifty, exhaustin' from the starboard side of his face. "I was only——"

"Yes, I know," says I. "You was about to wish you was young Rockefeller so you could buy up all of South Brooklyn for a potato patch; or was it a wish that they'd move the Polo Grounds down into Bryant Park so you could watch all the games from the back fire escape? Something sensible like that, I'll bet. And here you ain't got the gym fixed up for your session with that movie star who has to feature in a prize fight and don't know what a left jab is from a right hook. Say, when I sign up an official wisher I'll pick one that was born rubbin' a rabbit's foot, not one that was gyped from the start."

"Ah, you'd make a prize crab quit the business!" growls Swifty, movin' draggy toward the gym.

I expect that would have been the end of this wish symposium if I hadn't had an errand over in the chianti section of Rockhurst when I got home that afternoon, huntin' up a cousin of Dominick's that was to do some hedge trimmin' for me. Which is how I happens to drop into Dominick's four-room quarters over the macaroni dispensary. And when six or eight of the young Salvatore kids had been shooed out of the sittin' room I had a chance to look

around. It's furnished neat but gaudy, with a bright green carpet sportin' bright red flowers, bright blue portieres, and a shiny oak table.

On a stand by the east window, though, is something worth lookin' at. First off I thought it was all artificial, but when I comes to feel of the leaves blamed if I don't find that it's the real thing—an orange tree about four feet high, with nearly a dozen yellow oranges on it.

"Ain't tied on either, eh?" says I to Dominick. "Reg'lar eatin' oranges, are they?"

"Sure Mike!" says Dominick in perfect English.

"Well, you're some indoor gardener, I'll say," says I. "Raise it from seed, did you?"

"No," says Dominick. "Uncle Guiseppe bring him over from Napoli in littla pot. Fine, eh? Pippa, she t'ink so, too."

"Who's Pippa?" I asks, lookin' around.

"Wait. I show you," says Dominick.

With that he reaches up to a cage hangin' overhead, opens the door, and out flits a gray mockin' bird.

"Him Pippa," says Dominick. "Listen."

Pippa knows his cue, all right. He takes a couple of circles around the room, then lights on the top branch of the orange tree, tips back his head, throws out his chest, and proceeds to let loose a song that would put Caruso in the second row of the chorus. Say' he's an ace when it comes to warblin', Pippa is. Ever hear one really unstopper himself and pour out the trills? Not just a few notes over and over, but a whole concert. Honest, it's worth buyin' a

five-dollar ticket and sittin' in the second balcony.

"Say," I asks, "can you get him to turn that on whenever you like?"

"If he can sit on orange tree," says Dominick, "he seeng. Any time."

"Huh!" says I, scratchin' my head thoughtful. And in a minute or so the thought has bored down through the bone. In other words, my so-called brain has been penetrated by an idea. "Say, Dominick," I goes on, "I think I can make a date for you and Pippa to pull that act in our best circles. I'll let you know later."

And inside of half an hour I'm over at Boomer-Day's inspectin' his dinin' room with him.

"Uh-huh!" says I. 'It could be hung from the ceilin' and the door sprung open by a pull at a cord."

"I beg pardon?" says Boomer-Day. "What door?"

"I got a hunch for your dinner party, that's all," says I.

"Oh, have you?" says he enthusiastic.

"It all depends on what you've done with that cabinet music machine you used to have in the lib'ry," says I.

"Oh, that obsolete horror!" says Boomer-Day. "That is stored in the attic, I believe."

"Then have it brought down," say I. "I'll phone you where to send it."

Course, my next call is on Feltner. "Say, I see you got a new delivery truck," says I. "What's become of the old Henry?"

He says it's still in the garage and admits that it's in perfect runnin' order except for loose connectin' rods, a leaky radiator and a few little trifles like that.

"Would you swap it for an A1 vicronola with half a dozen books full of records?" I asks.

Would he? He almost begs me to lead him to it.

"Never mind," says I. "You'll have it before night, and all you have to do is hand over the flivver truck to a party who'll bring an order from me."

"Hey, Rosie!" he shouts into the back room. "Excuse me, Professor. I must tell Rosie."

Talk about rubbin' a magic lamp or wavin' a wand! Say, I leave it to you if I didn't put over the good fairy stuff equal to anything you ever read in a book. And twenty-four hours later, as I'm sittin' at home with Sadie she has to ask me why I'm wearin' the satisfied grin.

"I was just thinkin' what a success I was as a he-fairy," says I.

"You!" says Sadie. "What's the joke?"

"Now, ain't that just like a woman!" says I. "If I go around distributin' happiness with both hands, givin' three families the one thing that they've been wishin' for hardest, it's a joke, is it?"

"But who, how?" demands Sadie.

So I has to tell her how I got a four-cylinder substitute for Dominick's spavined Pietro, how I've satisfied Rosie Feltner's longin' for canned jazz music, and what a smart-set surprise act I've helped the Boomer-Days slip to the Count and Countess Barzoni.

"Really, Shorty!" gasps Sadie. "Why—why, I think that's awfully clever of you."

"Oh, quite simple!" says I, wavin' my hand careless.

"Wasn't Dominick delighted?" she asks.

"I had all I could do to keep him from kissin' me," says I.

"And I'm sure the Feltners were pleased," she goes on.

"Old man Feltner nearly wept on them drop cakes," says I. "I expect he's already got Rosie married to a rich plumber with a jazz disposition."

"And the Count and Countess must be getting a thrill about now," she adds. "Just think! A mocking bird singing in an orange tree! Why, it will make them think they're back in Italy. And you arranged it all yesterday afternoon?"

"Just used the little old bean," says I. "That's all it needs to spread sunshine where there is gloom —a kind heart and a little dome work. Course, I don't claim any special credit."

"Oh, no," says Sadie sarcastic. "Of course! But honestly, Shorty, I didn't think it was in you."

"No," says I. "You never do. But ask Mrs. Boomer-Day tomorrow."

Trust Sadie. She does. And when I comes home that night she hands me the report prompt.

"Pippa didn't make so much of a hit, after all," she says. "The Countess was nervous all the time he was loose, she was so afraid the bird would light on her hair. And the Count is so deaf, you know, he can't hear anything but a siren whistle. Before

the fish was served they had to call in Dominick to catch Pippa and put him back in his cage."

"But how about the orange tree with real oranges growin' on it?" I ask.

"The Countess didn't know until after dinner that it wasn't artificial," says Sadie.

"Huh!" says I. "Well, the Feltners are happy, anyway."

I was sure of that until I happened into the bakery two or three days later and was tryin' to give Feltner another order. It's a little hard makin' him understand on account of the Blooey Blues bein' ground out boisterous in the next room.

"Hey, Rosie!" he shouts. "Can't you let up on that infernal racket a minute yet? Yeouw—zing! Yeouw-zing! All day and all night is too much of that. I got a few nerves, remember, and pretty quick I come with a hatchet. You hear me, Rosie!"

Still there was Dominick, revellin' in all the joy that a flivver truck can bring. That is, there he was until I finds him this mornin', halfway down to the station, with his coat off and the sweat runnin' down his face and blisters on both hands from windin' up Lizzie.

"Eh?" says I. "What's wrong with the flivver, Dominick? Has it balked on you?"

"All time balk," says Dominick. "More than one hour I crank her, and all she do is make noise like tom-cat. Fsst! Fsst! I t'ink she nodamgood. I weesh——"

"Don't Dominick!" says I. "It's a bad habit. Anyway, don't register your wishes with me. I'm

off that line. Absolutely. As I frame it up the things folks think they want are the things they get tired of quickest. Course, I can't stop 'em from havin' their little wants, but after this they can wish themselves black in the face for all of me. As a he-fairy I don't rate one-two-sixteen."

Did I admit as much to Sadie? Say, what's the use? She knew it all along.

XIX

LEAVING IT TO SULLY

NOW, Shorty McCabe!" says Sadie. "You've just got to, that's all."

And say, when friend wife calls you by your full name and gets on that injured look and uses that tone of voice—well, you know how it is. Maybe you know what to do at that stage of the game, too. I don't. Up to a certain point I can josh through a fireside debate and split about fifty-fifty. But when I get a flat ultimatum hurled right at my front teeth I'm about as much good at domestic diplomacy as a bull pup tryin' to convince a mother cat how he only meant to take a friendly sniff at her kittens.

In other words, I get mulish. Uh-huh! The streak is there all right. As a rule I keep it well under the surface, but once in a while, when I'm scratched deep enough, it comes to the top. You can almost see me wave my ears.

"Oh, I have, have I?" says I, indicatin' sarcasm.

No, it wasn't the familiar case of whether or not I should wear my open-face suit to some evenin' affair. We thrash that out about every so often and if I'd kept a record of how many times I'd lost out by cuttin' a nick in the wardrobe door it would be

pretty well notched up. This was just as serious a question though. Anyway, that's the way Sadie seems to take it.

You see, she had a society act all framed up. Nothing less than an afternoon tea. Course, she'd had 'em before, but mainly they'd been hen parties. This one, though, was to be a mixed sandwich fight, a he-and-she party, with almost everybody in the neighborhood who had any social ratin' asked in. The big idea, I gather, is to pay off a lot of similar debts at one whack, and incidentally to let certain parties know that we'd had the livin' room done over in old ivory and French gray, with window hangin's and chair coverin's to match. And to make it a real smart event, one that would be good for half a column in the society notes of the "Rockhurst Register," she'd planned to include some choice specimens of the male of the species. Also I'm shocked and pained to discover that I'm expected to stick around durin' the tea orgy.

"No," says I. "Absolutely not. I've been dragged into church weddin's, and lived through 'em; I've managed to struggle through formal dinners at the Purdy-Pells; and I take you to dances at the Yacht Club now and then. But there's a limit, Sadie, and the letterin' on the boundary line reads 'Afternon Teas.' Sorry, but I'm off 'em for life."

"Why, you've never been to one," she protests.

"I've listened in on 'em from the outside," says I. "That's enough. Honest, now Sadie, can you picture me backed into a corner balancin' a sandwich plate and a cup and saucer in one hand, a hunk

of cake in the other, a palm leaf ticklin' me in the neck, and me tryin' to pass out the sprightly chatter to a couple of fat old dames like Mrs. Boomer-Day and——"

"Other men do it and survive," breaks in Sadie. "Why can't you?"

"What others?" I asks.

"Well, Pinckney," she says.

"Oh, him!" says I. "Why, he was brought up tellin' sweet young things whether he'd have cream or two lumps and lemon. He was born parlor broke and never had to learn what to do with his hands or how to sit down in frock coat without mussin' the tails. Who else you got on your list?"

"Why," says she, "Mr. Boomer-Day is coming, and the Reverend Tutt, and Mr. Purdy-Pell and—"

"I'd fit in fine with that combination, wouldn't I?" says I. "Suppose I should ask the Reverend Tutt how he was bettin' on Dempsey, or get Purdy-Pell started statin' his views on the administration, or make some break to Boomer-Day like askin' if the Missus wasn't a little overweight this season?"

That should have been a good line, too. I leave it to you. But it don't get me anywhere with Mrs. McCabe. That is, nowhere that I was headin' for. As a matter of fact it lets me in bad. She tells me all about it, prompt and eloquent. What is she going to say, she wants to know, when people look around and ask where I am? For if all the other men are there and I'm missin' it will look queer. Must she admit that with all the trainin' I've had

I'm still too rough in the neck to mingle in polite society? And if she didn't admit it, wouldn't they think it, anyway? And how do I suppose that's going to make her feel? Eh?

Say, after two or three chapters of this she had me scrapin' my front hoof. But that mulish streak was still uncovered. All I could do was wag my head stubborn and get red in the ears.

"What do I care what they think?" says I. "I may be rough in the neck and low in the brow, but I'm not soft enough in the head to stand for a pink tea. Not me. I know what them affairs are, and if there's any lower form of social entertainment, so called, from a Siwashpotlach to the annual outing of Plumbers' Union No. 26, I ain't discovered it yet. And if you think I'm goin' to stand around lookin' foolish among a lot of gabblin' women for a whole afternoon you've got me down wrong. I just can't see myself doin' it, Sadie. If I should I'd blush at myself every time I looked in the glass for the next month."

And, strange to say, for once that ended the argument. I'd won out. But about two more victories like that and one of us would be establishin' a residence in Reno. Sadie don't say another word on the subject, but I could see her lip quiver as she walked off, and for the next twenty-four hours or so my standin' in our happy home was about that of a handcuffed defendant who's been found guilty on two counts and is waitin' to be sentenced.

I could have stood it better if the children hadn't somehow gathered the idea that I'd committed a

great crime. I expect Little Sister was kind of vague about it, but from Sully's actions she got wise that I was in deep disgrace. He discovers it durin' dinner when our usual lively table chat gives way to a gloomy silence.

"What's matter, Pop?" he demands.

"Now never mind, Sully," warns Sadie.

"Ah, why not tell him?" says I. "Want him to think I've been caught in a Red raid, or pinched for settin' fire to an orphan asylum?"

"You wouldn't understand, Sully," goes on Sadie, ignorin' me altogether, "but your father has seen fit to class himself as a social outlaw. He claims that he isn't civilized enough to appear in his own home when I am entertaining a few of my friends."

"Huh!" says Sully, glancin' at me accusin'. "I know. He's goin' to duck the tea."

"Precisely," says Sadie. "And I am ashamed for him."

"Aw, Pop!" protests Sully. "Why not take a chance?"

"Now that'll do from you, young man," says I grouchy.

It wasn't until the next mornin' either, that I thought up this weak excuse. "I ought to take Sully to town and get him some new knicker suits and a pair of shoes," says I. "Besides, you don't want him knockin' around while the tea party's goin' on, do you?"

"Oh, very well," says Sadie, sighin'.

As a general thing, too, that would have had

Sully wearin' a wide grin, with the prospects of dodgin' school for a whole day, spendin' the forenoon at the Physical Culture Studio talkin' to Swifty Joe, and havin' luncheon with me at a chop house. But this time it's evident that he ain't got so much enthusiasm for associatin' with a dad who, when it comes to a pinch, don't rate with such parties as the Reverend Tutt, or Purdy-Pell, or even Boomer-Day. Funny, ain't it, how they'll always side with mother? That is, it's funny when it don't come quite so close home.

Sully don't favor me with his usual line of fool questions on the train ride in. Mostly he looks out of the window without passin' any remarks. And he don't tease to patronize the candy butcher, or demand an ice cream soda when we strike the Grand Central. Oh, yes, he kept me in my place, all right. He showed me where a disgraced parent ought to be, and all my little stabs at establishin' friendly relations once more didn't get over at all. I expect even the clothing store clerk caught the situation for he hardly consults me at all, but lets Sully do all the decidin' between suits. And blamed if Joe, my old chop house waiter, don't catch it and suggest that maybe the youngster knows better what he wants for luncheon than I do.

By that time I'm so squelched that I lets Sully make a meal off three kinds of pastry and a dish of ice cream. So you can see where I stood. My stock as a dad was way below par with no bids quoted.

And that kind of got me grittin' my teeth. Also

I expect I worked up that old ring smile of mine that I used to spring when a round or two had been goin' against me. Was I goin' to quit just because I had the fam'ly down on me? Then I got my hunch.

"The Giants are playin' a double-header up at the Polo grounds, Sully," says I. "How about takin' it in?"

Sully gasps a bit, then smothers it and observes careless: "Oh, all right."

And him one of the biggest ball fans for his inches you could find anywhere in Westchester county! Ain't he star pitcher and captain of the Grade Six nine that played the Eighth Grade combination clean off its feet last spring? And can't he give you all the leadin' battin' percentages, and tell you the latest rulin' on spitballs, or who the batteries were out at Cincinnati when the pennant was won? So an invite to see a big league double-header should have had him dancin' on his toes. It don't, though.

But I don't let on to take any notice of this strange behavior. After I've given Swifty a few instructions about takin' care of some reg'lars I was expectin' that afternoon I tows Sully over to the L station and we joins the mob streamin' uptown.

"Grand stand or bleachers?" I asks as we gets to the ticket window.

"Aw, let's get as near behind the plate as we can," says Sully. "I want to see what they're puttin' on the ball this season."

So I blows myself to a couple of the best seats

without any more cheers from Sully. As we're bein' showed into our chairs by an usher, though, I gets the hail from the press box.

"Hello, Shorty!" sings out a tall, lanky chap with a good-natured face.

"Howdy, Grant," says I, givin' him the friendly wave.

"Say, Pop," whispered Sully, "who was that?"

"Oh, only Grant Rice," says I.

"Not—not the big sport writer?" asks Sully.

"Uh-huh!" says I. "Here he comes now."

"Why so aloof, Shorty?" says Grant. "Come on down with the boys."

"Oh, I got the youngster with me," says I.

"Bring him right along," says Grant. "I expect this is Master Sullivan McCabe, eh? Got him in trainin' to be another belt winner?"

"Sully?" says I. "Not much. His ambition just now is to pitch for the Giants some day in a world series. He'll tell you about his last season strikeout record."

But Sully wouldn't tell a thing to anybody. Not a yip. He just gazes awed at Grant Rice and the other box-score artists as we follow down front among the telegraph tickers and sport page celebrities. I've never seen him quite so stunned and subdued. But them eyes of his ain't missin' a trick and his ears are stretched for every word that drops.

"There's the Mayor in his box, Sully," says I, nudgin' him.

Sully gives him a glance and then turns back to watch Grant Rice light a cigarette.

"And here's De Wolff Hopper in the next box," says I.

Sully don't even roll his eyes at that.

Meanwhile some of the Giants have trotted out for practice and over to one side Rube Benton is unlimberin' his salary wing. Sully, who's been given a chair in the front row, glues his eyes on Rube. In a minute or so Manager McGraw wanders out and is called up to the box by a reporter who wants to know when he's goin' to give that new Holy Cross find of his a try-out. Course, when Muggsy spots me in the press box he gives me the old hail.

"How's tricks, Shorty?" says he.

"Oh, in and out," says I. "How they runnin' with you, Jawn?"

"Say, Professor," he goes on, "Larry Doyle was askin' for you the other day. He's sunning himself on the bench here. Come on down and cheer him up."

"All right, Jawn," says I. "Come, Sully, let's mingle with the low-brows a while."

"Say, Pop," he whispers, "was—was that Mister McGraw himself?"

"Sure thing," says I. "Muggsy and no other."

And for the first time that day I feels Sully's hand slippin' into mine and grippin' it tight. I don't know whether he was breathin' or not as we edges onto the bench with all them great men. Anyway, I couldn't get a word out of him. Not even when I introduces him to Larry and Benny Kauff and tells 'em if they stick around long enough here's someone

who's workin' up a delivery that'll have 'em fannin' the air. Sully's eyes are stickin' out like a pair of doorknobs and he can't be pried an inch away from me.

Course, Larry Doyle has to remind me of the old days when we first met up out in Colorado and how I once staked him to a hotel bill when his bunch of bush leaguers went stranded. And Benny wants to know if I've been on another Coney Island party lately, like that one back in 1905. And a couple more old-timers strolled up and swapped grips.

Then the gong rang and we climbs back among the pencil pushers and the game is called. And through it all Sully sits there, watchin' every ball come over the plate and every play made. And he hears the sport writers discussin' among themselves whether So-and-so should get an error for not negotiatin' that fast low one, or who earned the assist on that lightnin' double play. He was close enough so he could listen in on the josh that's handed a player who's been nipped at third on a steal, or the remarks of a batter who's been called out on strikes with two on bases and wants to unload his opinion of the umpire without losin' a few days' pay for it.

Yes, I kind of think there wasn't anybody in that big grand stand or in any of the bleachers that got more real thrills out of them eighteen snappy innings than a certain youngster who never let out a sound but nudged me in the ribs with his elbow about every two minutes. And when it's all over, and we streams out with Grant Rice on one side and

Johnny Ward on the other, I expect he was a happy kid.

I was lookin' for him to cut loose with the wise sportin' comment durin' the ride home in the train, but it don't come. He just snuggles up to me in the seat and never makes a remark. Once in a while I noticed him glancin' up at me sort of curious, like he was just gettin' acquainted, but that's all. I couldn't quite make him out.

It's kind of late when we gets home and of course the tea party is all over. Sadie's waitin' dinner for us, lookin' sort of tired and dissatisfied.

"Well," says I, by way of breakin' the ice, "I expect a good time was had by all?"

"I'm sure I don't know," says she. "I hope so."

"All the noble males showed up, did they," I asks, "and displayed their best parlor manners?"

"Humph!" says she. "I suppose it was their best. Most of them gathered in the library and smoked, leaving Pinckney and the Reverend Tutt to do all the talking to the ladies. The only one I could coax out to the tea table was Boomer-Day, and he dropped a mayonnaise tomato sandwich on Mrs. Horton's satin slipper. Such an impossible lot of men!"

"Too bad I hadn't stayed to bring up the average," I suggests.

"You!" sniffs Sadie. "I suppose if you had you'd have hidden in the basement. I'd like to know what use you are anyway, Shorty McCabe!"

"Ah, say, Mom!" breaks in Sully. "You don't know wotcher talkin' about."

"Why, Sully!" gasps Sadie. "What on earth do you mean by saying such a thing to me?"

"Well, you don't," insists Sully. "My Pop's some guy, I'll say. You ought to seen him today."

"Go on," says Sadie, eyein' him cold.

"Why," says Sully, "he knows Grantland Rice, and Mister McGraw, and Larry Doyle, and Benny Kauff, and people like that. Calls 'em by their first names, and they call him Shorty. Yes, sir. I heard 'em. And we was right down on the bench, too, and I shook hands with Rube Benton just before he went into the box. Whaddye know about that?"

"Wonderful!" says Sadie. "But I fail to see——"

"Does Pinckney Bruce or the Reverend Tutt know big men like that?" demands Sully. "Say, I'll bet they don't. Pop does, though. And would you catch any of 'em foolin' around at a tea party? Not much you wouldn't. And I don't blame Pop a bit for duckin'. He's a reg'lar guy, Pop is."

As for Sadie, she don't quite know how to take it until I gives her the humorous wink.

"You see?" says I. "At last I'm discovered."

Then she chuckles. "Sully," says she, "why have you been keeping this from me all this time?"

"Honest, Mom," says he, "I just got wise myself."

And so once more peace and good feelin' settles down on the house of McCabe.

XX

THE BICKFORDS IN A BROTHER ACT

MAY I ask, Shorty, who is your seedy friend?" says Pinckney.

"Seein' as you have, you may," says I. "I expect you was referrin' to the long party in the shiny blue serge and the premature straw lid?"

"Precisely," says Pinckney. "The one who saluted with his right thumb and hurried toward the telephone booth with such a resolute stride."

"In the first place," says I, "I can't hardly claim him as a friend. No. That's one of the expensive luxuries I'm denyin' myself. And in the next place, he ain't seedy. Not for him. Course, the sunkist straw lid may be beyond the bleachin' stage but it's a genuine Yippi-Yappi woven-under-water brand; and the blue serge came back from the pressin' shop no later than 9 A. M.; and the chamois gloves had a hand basin wash only yesterday, I'll bet. Also you might have noticed that he was sportin' a fresh collar and a clean shave. So if you'd seen Bill as often as I have durin' the last six months you'd be hep to the fact that, considerin' past performances, he is all gussied up."

"Bill who?" demanded Pinckney.

"William Slocum Bickford is the way he has it printed on his cards, when he has any," says I.

"Sounds rather impressive," says Pinckney. "Looks like an interesting character, too. I almost hope he comes this way again."

"Oh, he will," says I, "in about three minutes."

"I say, Shorty," says Pinckney, "let's wait."

"I can stand it if you can," says I.

As a matter of fact, there's no spot in New York, barrin' the corner of Forty-second Street and Broadway, where I'd rather put in half an hour after lunch. I expect you know that row of high-back Spanish chairs strung along the corridor in the Plutoria that connects the men's grill with the stock brokers' office? Not specially easy sittin', chairs like that. Too many rough-headed nails in the upholstery and no slant to the back. The Spaniard who invented 'em must have had a cast iron spine.

But if you camp along in that row anywhere between eleven in the mornin' and midnight you'll be reviewin' an interestin' parade of the male of the species, with now and then a few samples of the henna usin' sex. The sudden rich and those who trail the same, the gunner and the gunned. And it's the open season all the year round.

We'd been havin' our annual spring orgie, Pinckney and me, in the Plutoria grill. Shad roe and bacon. Maybe they cook it as well in other places. I don't know. We stick to the old Plutoria, and wait until the shad come in from the North River. And say, with them hunks of roe broiled to the shade of a golden oak bureau, and decorated up with

curls of crisp bacon and sprays of water cress, and a paprika splashed baked potato on the side—— Well, I leave it to you. After a meal like that who wouldn't feel sort of folksy and expansive, or ready to listen to what any Bill Bickford might have to offer?

Even before the three minutes was up I saw him driftin' back our way. He's tall and graceful, like a tent pole. Got kind of a distinguished lookin' face, too. Anyway, you'd remember it on account of the high cheek bones and the broken nose, and the deep lines furrowin' the hollow cheeks. Chiefly, though, you'd notice the shifty eyes. They're bright brown, or maybe you'd call 'em roan colored, and they're restless enough to belong to a fox, or to a defendant who was being cross examined by the district attorney.

"Ah, Professor McCabe!" says he, edgin' in on my lee side. "The very person I meant to look up this afternoon."

"What now, Bill?" says I. "Somebody been discoverin' an oil field up in Connecticut, or is it a case of a company bein' organized to extract radium from sea water?"

Mr. Bickford favors me with a disappointed glance and shrugs his shoulders. "Oh, come, Shorty!" he protests. "Just because one or two of my little enterprises haven't turned out as well as they might is no reason to think that they are all poor investments. And I've really got something good this time."

"Anything like Blitz Motors?" I asks.

"You know I was taken in on that deal," says he. "I honestly believed I was offering you something gilt edged."

"So you was tellin' me the day before the bunch was indicted," says I. "Well, what's your pet wildcat this trip?"

"A stock that is going to be a Curb sensation within three weeks," says Bill, fishin' out a high-colored prospectus. "Peruvian Manganese Developments. Do you know what a pound of manganese is worth today, Shorty, in any market in the world?"

"No, Bill, I got to admit I don't," says I. "Seldom buy my drugs at wholesale, and when——"

"It isn't a drug," breaks in Bill.

"Huh!" says I. "That only shows then what a fish I'd be to put my money into something I might stir up for a headache powder when it was really used to set diamonds in."

"Wrong again," says Bill. "But you could easily learn, Shorty, that manganese is a substance which at least two of our most important industries cannot do without. Why, the whole world is hungry for manganese, while there in Peru our company has discovered vast deposits which——"

"No use, Bill," says I. "When I was puttin' on exhibition bouts I had to cancel a date at Peru because the mayor wanted to soak us a hundred bucks for a license, and since then I've been off them Indiana towns for good. Course, they may have a new mayor by this time, but——"

"I didn't know," puts in Bill, "but what you

might have some friends who would know a good thing when they saw it." And with that he glances at Pinckney.

"Why, sure!" says I. "Pinckney, this is Mr. William Slocum Bickford; the one I was tellin' you about. And, say, if you want to get in on the ground floor of some little enterprise that's liable to be payin' 200 per cent or more—or less—listen to him."

"With pleasure," says Pinckney. "Not that I ever do any investing on my own account. The Trust Company attends to that sort of thing for me. And my knowledge of manganese is quite as limited as Shorty's. I'm afraid I should have guessed that it was some sort of cheese. But tell me more about it, Mr.—er—Bickford. How recently were you in Peru?"

"As a matter of fact," explains Bill, "I haven't been in Peru at all. I want to go, though, and if I can find someone interested enough in the claims of this company I'll go down and bring back the true dope. Honest, I will."

"Are you a chemist, or a mining engineer?" asks Pinckney.

"A little of both," says Bickford. "I've knocked around mines more or less; all kinds, from deep shaft copper properties to open pit iron. Also I've held down various jobs in 'em, from running a blower engine to making out assay slips."

"That's interesting," says Pinckney. "When did you graduate and become a promoter's agent?"

"Oh, I've been at this for nearly a year," says

Bill. "Had about enough of it, between you and me. Think of living in one place for a whole year!"

"Then I understand," says Pinckney, "that you prefer to travel about?"

"I want to knock around," says Bill. "Peru sounds good to me. And I'm liable to get there. There's an agent for a German firm who's thinking it over. He's interested, all right, but those square heads are a cagey lot. I thought I had him all hooked yesterday—first-class passage and two months' advance salary—and then he has to stall around while he cables his people. I must land something pretty soon or I'll have to hunt a ballyhoo job with a round top."

"I beg pardon," says Pinckney. "What kind of a job?"

"Outside barker in front of the freak tent," says Bill. "The pay isn't much, but you get your chow regular. Or I wouldn't mind signing up as purser on one of these sixty-day excursion cruisers. I made a couple of trips to the Mediterranean that way. I'd even consider taking on a head steward dining car snap on a good run. That paid me well the winter I tried it."

"Do you mean to say, Mr. Bickford," asks Pinckney, "that you have—ah—had experience in all these different lines?"

Bill grins and admits that he has, adding that he ain't half told the story of his various activities. He proceeds to name a few more, beginning with the time when he was press agent for a blackboard evangelist, passing on to his three months as assist-

ant trainer with a troup of performin' dogs, and he was just describin' a trip he once made to Persia with an Armenian rug buyer when a bell-hop wanders down the corridor pagin' somebody in the usual bell-hop style; that is, it sounded like he was tryin' to sing "My Baby's Arms" through his adenoids. But Bill breaks off his yarn, listens to him a minute, and then snaps his fingers.

"Did you say Bickford, boy?" he asks.

"Uh-huh!" says the bell-hop. "Mis'r Henry Slocum Bickford."

"You mean William Slocum, don't you?" insists Bill.

"Nope," says the boy, consultin' the written slip on his card tray. "Says Henry, don't it?"

"It does," says Bill. "Hardly seems possible, but there it is. And say, son, if you find Henry Slocum Bickford come back here and tell me where he is, will you?"

"Sure!" says the bell-hop, wanderin' on.

"Some relation of yours, Bill?" I asks.

"My only brother, that's all," says Bill.

"Oh!" says I. "Workin' along the same lines, eh?"

"Who, Hen?" says he. "Lord, no! Hen's just a plain farmer. Six miles northwest of Beloit, Wis. That's Brother Hen's latitude and longitude. Always has been, and I guess always will be. You see, he was seven years older than me, so when father checked out Henry just naturally stepped in as boss. He was a hard boss, I'll say. All he wanted me to do was to roll out of the straw about

4 A. M., help the hired man feed and water the stock, milk twenty-eight cows, and load up the creamery wagon before breakfast. From then until 7:30 P. M. he'd map out a program that kept me on the jump, with maybe half an hour out for meals. I was nineteen and husky, so it didn't kill me. But I didn't like it. We had a few arguments on the subject, Hen. and I, but when he tried to convince me with a hoe handle I skipped over the back fence and headed for Milwaukee.

"More'n twenty years ago, that was, and we haven't met since. Yet we have kept track of one another, in a way. That is, I always knew where Hen. was. Once when I was stranded up in Seattle I wrote asking him how about my share of the estate. He wrote back offering me $400, and I took it. The old farm must have been worth at least five thousand, even then. But I had a whale of a time for three or four weeks there. Wound up in Honolulu, I remember, flat broke, and only got back by shipping as cabin steward on a P. & O. boat. Say, though, there's a Kanaka girl out there I'd like to see again. Yea—uh, I would."

"But see here, Bill," I puts in, "if your brother is a Wisconsin farmer, what's he doin' as a guest here at the Plutoria?"

"Oh, it can't be him," says Bill. "First off, he'd never get so far from Beloit. And if he did, he'd never put up at a joint like this. Some seventy-five-cent lodging house would be more his style, with meals at a hashery. Somebody's made a mis-

take in the name, or else this is another Henry Slocum Bickford altogether."

"That seems hardly likely," suggests Pinckney. "Rather an odd combination of names, you know. And if it should be your only brother, of course you wouldn't want to miss seeing him."

"N-n-n-no, of course not," says Bill, sort of draggy. "Still, we never were crazy about one another, you understand. I don't know as I should be so proud of Henry, any more'n he would be of me. He must be a whiskered old Rube by this time, with hayseed ideas and the smell of the cow barn on his boots. But it can't be him. Not here."

"No?" says I. "Well, take a look. Who's this trailin' along with your friend the bell-hop?"

After one glance Bill lets out a gasp. "Blamed if it isn't old Hen!" says he.

He's kind of a heavy set party, not near so tall as Bill, and with hardly any of the same earmarks about him. Course, his eyes are about the same shade of brown as Bill's, but they're steady under the bushy eyebrows, and his face ain't lined so deep. I wouldn't say he was costumed in the regulation farmer's outfit, either. Anyway, nothing like the way a stage Rube would be dressed. His gray sack coat might have fitted a little snugger around the collar, but it looks like it had been custom built of expensive goods, and the gray Fedora hat showed no cobwebs or alfalfa spears on it. Also, barrin' a droopy lip whisker and a set of bristly ear tufts, Henry sports no facial herbage whatever.

He ain't as quick at spottin' an old brother,

though, as Bill was. For one thing, I suppose, he'd had no previous hunch. As he comes up to our trio he looks us over casual.

"Well?" says he. "Someone want to see me?"

Bill winks at me humorous. "Oh, not 'special," says he. "I didn't know but you might remember me."

It's a slow, careful size-up that Bill gets, and then, with no jumpy emotion, hardly without battin' an eyelash, Hen. remarks: "I do now. You're Bill, I suppose."

"Right, Old Stick-in-the-Mud!" says Bill. "How did you guess it?"

"By the crooked nose," says Hen. "You got that trying to show me how you could do a trapeze act same as you'd seen at the circus. Ever get that trick down fine, Bill?"

"No," says Bill, "but I did learn to keep six balls in the air and balance a cane on my chin at the same time. I earned my way from Dawson City to El Paso with that stunt once, collecting a crowd for an herb doctor."

"Humph!" says Hen. "And after you got to this El Paso place—what then?"

"Oh, I drifted down to Mexico City from there," says Bill, "and then over to Havana. Ever steam past El Moro just at daybreak, Hen., and go ashore to eat fish fried in paper bags at Dos Hombres on the water front?"

"No," says Hen. "All I ever steamed at daybreak was shorts and potatoes for the hogs."

"Proud of it, too, I expect?" suggests Bill.

"I'm satisfied, anyway," says Hen.

"Stuck to the old farm all these years, eh?" asks Bill.

"Pretty much," admits Hen.

"Just grubbing away?" goes on Bill.

Hen. nods.

"How'd your happen to break loose and stray this far?" asks Bill, kind of patronizin'.

"Couple of cows coming in," says Hen.

"Cows?" says Bill, starin' at him. "Where from?"

"England," says Hen. "Some mix-up on the import duties I had to straighten out. Besides, I wanted to see 'em loaded into the right kind of car, and place the insurance and all. Darned nuisance, but I had to come on."

"Must be some valuable cows," says Bill. "What do you rate 'em at?"

"Oh, about six thousand apiece," says Hen.

Bill lets out a whistle. "Come now, Hen.," says he, "you don't mean to tell me the old farm produces enough to let you buy cows at that price?"

"Might not, at that," admits Hen. "But I've bought up a few other farms since, and with what I get out of the creamery, and my salary as president of the bank—— Well, I guess I can afford cows like that, Bill. I've got a dozen or more just as good, anyway."

For a second or so Bill gawps at him. "Why," says he, "you—you must be a rich man, Hen.?"

"Me?" says Hen. "No, no! Fairly well fixed for a farmer, maybe; but not rich, Bill."

"You're staying here at the Plutoria, though," insists Bill.

"Oh, yes," says Hen. "It's costing me an awful lot, too. But they do make you comfortable here —three rooms and bath, with mighty good meals. You see, our company has a contract to supply 'em with all their butter and cheese. Fancy prices, too, so I thought I ought to patronize 'em while I'm here. It'll only be for a week or so."

"Huh!" says Bill. "A four-room suite at the Plutoria for a week! You're no farmer, Hen. You're a dairy magnate."

"Pshaw!" says Hen. "That's what them fool Chicago papers are always calling me. But I ain't. I'm just an old Stick-in-the-Mud, Bill, same as you called me at first. You might have been one, too, if you'd grubbed along on the farm. Lucky you didn't, eh? You're a—say, Bill, just what are you now?"

That jab sort of got under Bill's skin. I could see him pinkin' up in the ears. "Why," says he, "I'm a stock promoter just at present. I—er—I specialize in mining stocks, you know."

"Sounds kind of grand," says Hen, lookin' him over critical. "Pays well, I expect. You stoppin' here, too, Bill?"

"No," says Bill. "Not—not regular."

"Oh!" says Hen. "Business so brisk you can't find time to get a new hat or have your tailor make you a new suit, eh?"

Bill shrugs his shoulders. "No use trying to bluff you, Hen.," says he. "I'm a good deal of

a flivver when it comes to pickling away the kale. I pass mine along quick, mostly to ticket agents."

"Well, that's one way of gettin' rid of it," says Hen. "You're not ready to quit, I suppose?"

"Whaddye mean, quit?" asks Bill.

"We could use a new head shipper at the creamery," suggests Hen. "Paying fifty a week. Well?"

"And me anchored for life six miles northwest of Beloit?" says Bill. "I couldn't do it, Hen. There's so much more I want to see yet."

"Suit yourself," says Hen. "Lucky you can do what you want. So long, Bill."

He was movin' off when the bell-hop appears again and holds him up. "Say, which of you gents is Mister William Slocum Bickford?" he demands. "I forget."

"I'm the one," says Bill. "What is it?"

"Phone message," says the boy. "Party couldn't wait. Says for you to hustle down and sign a contract and that your steamer sails at 6:30."

"Whee-e-e-e!" says Bill, slappin' Brother Hen. on the shoulder. "How about that, eh? A lucky break at last. Know where I'm off for now, Hen.? Peru, South America."

"Humph!" says Hen. "So that's luck is it?"

Which is the end of a fam'ly reunion that's lasted not more'n ten minutes by the clock.

"Odd that they should meet here, eh?" says Pinckney. "As my man, Snivens, is so fond of observing, 'it's a small world, isn't it?' "

"Seems so," says I, "until you run out of clean shirts and try havin' your laundry expressed up to some place like Boothbay Harbor, Maine, or Buck Hills Falls, Pa. Then it stretches out scandalous."

XXI

KENNETH SHOWS CLASS

"POOR KENNETH!" sighs Sadie, gazin' after him kind of mushy and sentimental.

"Poor fish, if you ask me!" says I.

"But no one is asking you, Shorty," remarks Sadie sarcastic. "You're prejudiced against him, of course."

"Me?" says I. "Not a bit. Only I think such white-livered parlor pets ought to be decorated with a pink bow on the left arm and led around to afternoon teas by a French maid. Poor Kenneth! Huh! He's what I'd call a human nut-sundae, he is."

And having registered my sentiments moderate and mild as usual, I closes the debate by walkin' off.

As a matter of fact I'd been sort of fed up on Kenneth these last two or three weeks. He's something Mrs. Purdy Pell brought home from a week-end party over at Tarrytown. "One of my discoveries," she calls him. Well, maybe. I knew a party who took a chance once on spendin' a hot night at a Coney Island hotel, and in the mornin' between scratches he discovered something too, but he wasn't proud of it.

Not insinuatin' that Kenneth ever bit anybody,

understand. He's about as harmless a male specimen as you'd run across anywhere. One of these slim, pasty-faced youths with long white fingers, a forelock of black hair fallin' over his pallid brow, and big brown eyes, like a setter dog's.

No, he wasn't a musical genius, nor a free verse poet, nor even a freak artist. Play writin' was Kenneth's line. He'd had a one-act piece put on by a bunch of them near-amateurs down around Sheridan Square and some dramatic critic had had a fit over it. Must have been a sweet thing. I had the plot sketched out to me and I've been pink in the ears ever since. Don't ask me to say what it was all about. The hero was a coke addict, the heroine a lovely lady with a reputation as free from spots as a coach dog, and the happy ending shows 'em going to a fond clinch after they've each tossed off a muriatic acid highball.

How a poached egg like Kenneth could think up stuff like that is by me, but that seems to be his specialty. He's done a lot of others that he can't get put on even by the band-box companies. Most of 'em deal with the hectic passions of hectic people and nearly all end with dyin' gasps on a dark stage.

I ought to be able to describe 'em better, for I've had to listen to enough of 'em. Oh, yes, Kenneth can be induced to read his plays to a select audience on occasion. You don't have to urge him very hard. In fact, I don't think you could stop him at times, unless you used a gag. All he demands is a dozen or so people grouped around breathless with the doors locked, the telephone muffled, and a place

where he can stand with the light from a rose shaded floor lamp playin' over his putty-colored features. Also, if he's in the right mood he'll tell you how utterly commonplace and boresome are the dull plays the Broadway managers are imposin' on the public, and how the Barrymores could play something really worth while if they'd let him write a piece for 'em.

In other words, Kenneth kind of favors himself. He's his own press agent and booster club, and there's one subject that he's willin' to talk on to anybody at any time. Uh-huh! Kenneth. Why, one night over at our house while we was waitin' for the ladies to come down for dinner he even gives me an earful, just because I'd looked him over curious, from the pipe-stem ankles to the thin neck, and asked him how it was he happens to write about such rough doin's.

"Do you work up your bad dreams into plays, or what?" I asks.

"Only stupid persons who have failed to rid themselves of silly old fears and inherited inhibitions have bad dreams," says Kenneth. "My dreams are wonderful excursions into unknown lands, or delightful experiences, such as being tossed on great waves in a milk warm sea."

"Huh!" says I, gawpin' at him.

"But my dramatic inspirations," he goes on, "usually come to me at early dawn, when I first waken. And nearly always in the same way. I seem to be looking through a door or window illuminated from behind with a brilliant orange light. And there, in that vivid space, the characters appear suddenly

and enact the thrilling scenes which I write about afterwards. It is the subtle working of the unconscious ego, I presume. Don't you think it might be that?"

"Ye-e-es," says I. "Or worms."

As a rule, though, I ducked gettin' into close quarters with Kenneth. When he wasn't spoutin' his plays he was apt to get on sort of a whiny tone and a peevish, spoiled kid expression that made me ache to slap him on the wrist. You should see him orderin' the women around, makin' 'em wait on him, and gettin' 'em to fuss over him.

"Oh, bother!" he would rap out. "I've mislaid my cigarette case again. Ah, thank you! And may I ask you, my dear Mrs. McCabe, to turn out those ceiling lights? I detest a top lighting. Always reminds me of Pullman cars. There! That is much better. No, I prefer not to sit in an easy chair. If you'll give me one of those cushions I'll just squat cross-legged here on the rug, like a Pasha in his tent, you know. I believe I must have been a Turk in a previous incarnation, my tastes are all so Oriental. Haven't you noticed it?"

And two or three of the ladies would murmur that they had. Yes, he knew how to keep 'em hoppin' and flutterin' around.

All except Ann Whitney. He tried it on her the first time they met, which was one evening over at the Purdy Pells, when he was gettin' ready to read one of his pieces.

"I say, Miss-er-Miss Whitney, isn't it?" he re-

marks. "Would you mind pulling those door draperies a trifle closer?"

"I think I shall allow you to arrange them to suit yourself," says Ann, half smotherin' a yawn behind her fan.

You see Ann Whitney had been kind of used to havin' most of the hoppin' and flutterin' done around her. Rather. Not that she worked up the act, or demanded it, but she was the kind of girl that just naturally got the suspender wearin' sex doing that very thing. No use in my tryin' to sketch out Ann for you, for she's the kind they put on magazine covers. Only I might say that her front name is about as appropriate as Betsy would be for an ocean liner. She should have been born Princess So-and-so, or Lady Whosit, or at least, the Honorable Miss Whitney. And if she'd come from anywhere south of Asheville, N. C., instead of from Keene, N. H., she'd have been christened Louanna May, or Lola Belle, or something to indicate what a hand-picked pippin' her folks expected her to be.

Anyway, I hope you'll take my word for it that Ann is some girl, and you can play that hunch four ways for a win. Pick out your favorite from the Florodora Sextette, either past or present, and I'll back Ann to make her look like a cheap edition. For she's the real thing, Ann Whitney. I forget whether her fam'ly discovered the state of New Hampshire, or invented the White Mountains, or built the first house on the Concord river, but it was something like that. You could almost guess it just by the way Ann walks across a room.

Not that Ann's people have always stuck at home. They're just as liable to spend their winters in Rome or Biarritz, or Mentone, or Algiers, as they are in Keene, N. H. So you mustn't size her up for a village queen. I should say not. In fact, I should say that Ann had been about everywhere and done about everything, from skiing at St. Moritz to riding a camel out of Timbuctoo. And of course an easy looker like her couldn't have gone tourin' around like that without now and then meeting up with a noble male who would have the nerve to ask her to be his'n.

"Must have outgrown the squab class some seasons back," says I to Mrs. McCabe. "How does it happen, Sadie, that she's still Miss Ann? Is she too finicky, or what?"

"I'm sure I don't know, Shorty," says she. "She has had offers enough, goodness knows—football heroes, grand dukes, even a movie star. Why she has never married is rather a mystery. Suppose you ask her."

"Me!" I gasps. "Say I wouldn't dare ask her how many minutes she liked her eggs boiled. She gives me stage fright."

"Yes," agrees Sadie, "Ann is rather a regal young person. Perhaps that is why the right man has never proposed to her. The nice ones are apt to be too modest, you know."

"Like me, eh?" says I, and we swaps grins.

But Kenneth ain't troubled with any such handicap. After he'd been snubbed two or three times he succeeds in tearin' loose from his ego and starts

taking notice of Ann. First off he'd only stare at her steady for minutes at a time, but as that don't seem to have any effect he begins followin' her around, askin' to be put next to her at dinner parties, and trailin' her through the house and into the garden. And it ain't long before everybody who saw 'em together at all knew that Kenneth had a bad case.

That is, everybody except Ann Whitney. She had a way of looking right over his head, or through him, just as if he wasn't there, and chattin' with other people with him right at her elbow. Then when he'd finally crash in with a remark she'd seem sort of surprised to find him still present.

Must have been quite a jolt for Kenneth at first, after the way he'd been coddled and petted by the other women folks, but it didn't seem to discourage him a bit. He kept right on trottin' around at her heels, like one of those German sausage hounds. And when he didn't succeed in talking to Ann he'd take it out in talking to other people about her.

"I say," I heard him whisper husky to Mrs. Purdy Pell, "isn't the poise of her head perfectly exquisite? Like an empress wearing her crown. And such delicate coloring—mallow pink, blending into snow white!"

"Yes," admits Mrs. Purdy Pell. "I don't see how she keeps it, either, with all her golf and motoring and horseback riding. Still, she has acquired a few nose freckles."

"Adorable!" says Kenneth.

"You would hardly guess that she weighs nearly

160 pounds, would you?'' goes on Mrs. Purdy Pell.

''Oh, not really!'' says Kenneth, who might tip the scales at 120 maybe.

Trust a woman to make neat little jabs like that. Yet Kenneth don't scratch his entry on account of not being able to make the weight. He kept right on trailin' around as steady as if he was her official shadow. I don't know whether Miss Ann heard some whispered jokes about it, or if she was wise all the time and didn't let on. Anyway, here the other Saturday afternoon when Sadie has the bunch over at our place for what she calls a garden tea things sort of came to a head.

I'd ducked most of the affair by slidin' off early to see little Sully pitch five innings against the Neversweats and had only showed up in time to help pass the sandwiches so I hadn't kept track of the early moves. All I noticed was Miss Whitney strollin' alone out toward the rocks on our little patch of shore frontage with a pair of field glasses in her hand. And then, of course, Kenneth comes taggin' along after her. Next thing I knew she'd turned and discovered him. She stops right in her tracks, throws her chin up and stares at him. Must have been kind of a haughty stare, for Kenneth drags his heels and finally stops, too. Then she starts signalin' for me. I thought it might be for somebody else at first, and when I saw it wasn't I concludes she needs some more nourishment so I grabs a loaded tray and hustles along.

''Have a sandwich, Miss Whitney?'' says I.

''No, thank you, Mr. McCabe,'' says she. ''But

I wish you would go back and bring that young man here."

"Eh?" says I. "Kenneth?"

She nods.

"Did you say bring or send?" says I.

"Bring him, if you please," says she.

"Sure!" says I. "By the ear, if necessary, but I don't think I'll need to use force."

She simply shrugs her shoulders at that so I parks the sandwich tray on a handy lawn settee and marches back to where Kenneth is makin' a bluff at examinin' a flower bed.

"On the carpet for you, Kenneth," says I.

"I beg pardon?" says he, gawpin'.

"You're wanted at headquarters," says I. "Orders from Miss Ann. Come along now."

"Delighted," says Kenneth, and follows cheerful.

"No receipt necessary, I expect?" says I, as we reaches Ann. "And if that's all I'll be—"

"Please stay," says she. "I'd like someone to hear what I have to say. Now," and she turns to Kenneth, "what do you mean by following me about so persistently?"

It's an unexpected jolt for Kenneth. He opens his mouth once or twice before he can get out a word. "Why," says he, "I—er—I—"

"You can't possibly imagine that I have encouraged you in any way," she breaks in. "You're not stupid enough for that, I'm sure. And you must have seen that I dislike it. Yet for days I have been unable to stir without finding you close behind. This afternoon you have been particularly annoying.

While I was playing bridge you sat staring at me for two whole hours. Since then you have hardly left my elbow. It—it's absurd."

"You've no right to say that," protests Kenneth sulky. "Why is it absurd of me to admire anyone as lovely as you are? Why should that annoy you?"

"If you must know," says Ann, "it is not at all mutual. In fact, I think you are a particularly self-satisfied young person of a type which I distinctly do not care for. There! I had not meant to hurt your feelings, but—"

"Oh, no!" cuts in Kenneth bitter. "All you wanted to do was to insult me before McCabe here."

"I'm sorry you feel that way about it," says Ann. "But you have been making me rather conspicuous. If we had gone out here together it would have looked —well, as if I approved. And I do not. I simply wanted to tell you, as frankly and as kindly as I could, that—"

"Stop!" squeals Kenneth. "I won't be treated like a bad little boy. I won't, I tell you. I'm a man. It's rotten cruel of you, just because I'm not a big, beefy, overgrown hulk, to treat me like a youngster. What if I don't weigh as much as you do by half a hundred pounds? What if I'm not so strong? It's the mind that counts, isn't it? And my brain is fully a match for yours. You can't deny that, brilliant as yours is. At least, if you do, give me a chance to show you. You ought to. But no. You prefer to bully me, to humiliate me before others. And I won't have it. I—I'll—"

"Well?" asks Ann, gazin' at him sort of interested and curious.

"Oh, you think just because you're such a glorious, regal young person," goes on Kenneth, his big brown eyes flashin' excited and his slim white fingers twitchin' nervous, "that you can do anything. I suppose you've been made love to by dozens of men, big and strong and handsome. And you've smiled and sent them away. I'm glad you did. You've been saving yourself for me."

"For you?" echoes Ann, starin' at him.

"It was Fate," says Kenneth. "I knew it the moment I saw you. My psychic sense told me so. Oh, sneer if you will. You, too, McCabe. Laugh, both of you. You think I'm a weakling. But you will find, Ann Whitney, that I have a commanding soul. What do I mean to do? Tell everyone that I am in love with you. Yes, everyone. If this were the forest of Arden I would post it on the trees. But there's no need for that. See all those watching women back there? I shall tell them. Tell them, too, how you have bullied me. You think I don't dare? Just watch me."

Honest, he has started back toward the house, and Ann is gawpin' at him puzzled and worried, when I reaches out and grabs him by the collar.

"Oh, no you won't!" says I. "Not until after I'm through with you. What you need, young man, is to be ducked in the Sound two or three times. That'll cool you off. Eh, Miss Ann? Shall I pitch him in?"

"What do I care if you do?" says Kenneth. "Drown me, if you like. I can't defend myself, of

course. Or she can box my ears. Go on, Ann. You're strong enough. But you can't beat down my love for you, or drown it, or choke it."

"Ah, come!" says I. "Enough of that mush stuff. The young lady don't like it, and it makes me seasick. How about it, Miss Ann? Shall I souse him once or twice for luck?"

"N-n-no," says she, hesitatin'.

"But if I turn him loose he's liable to go blab what he said he would," says I.

"I will," insists Kenneth.

"You are a bad boy," says Ann.

"I'm a man," says Kenneth, "and I'm in love with you. They all know that, of course, but they would be thrilled to hear me say it."

"No doubt," says Ann. "And aren't you bullying me now?"

"Yes," says Kenneth. "And I mean to a lot more. You'll see."

"H-m-m-m!" says Ann. "Do you know, I've never been bullied before. It—it is rather a new sensation. I wonder how you'll try next."

"Unless you're afraid," suggests Kenneth, "you will come out on that point of rocks with me and find out."

"Well, at least I'm not afraid," says Ann. "Thank you, Mr. McCabe. I am going to ask you not to tell how absurd we've been."

"I'm a clam," says I.

And as they strolls out to the point together I wanders back. Course, Sadie nabs me and takes me one side.

"What was it all about, Shorty?" she demands.

"Whether I should dump Kenneth into the Sound, or Miss Ann should cuff his ears," says I. "We declared it a draw."

"Pooh!" says Sadie. "I don't believe a word of that."

As you might know, all the ladies was hep to the fact that Kenneth and Ann was twosin' out on the point, and they was some excited. They wanted to see how it would finish. But the pair didn't come back and they didn't come back. It got to be after six o'clock and time for the party to break up. Finally the guests begun to straggle away reluctant and at 6:45 the last one had gone. But no sign of Ann and Kenneth.

"Some session, I'll say," says I.

"Dinner is served," says Sadie. "And it would be awkward if they came in and found us at the table. Suppose you go out, Shorty, and ask them if they won't dine with us."

I wasn't crazy over the job, but I went. And three minutes later I'm back wearin' a blush.

"Uh-huh!" says I. "They'll be right in."

No foolin' Sadie, though. She'd spotted that foolish look on my face. "Tell me, Shorty," says she, "were they—that is, was Kenneth holding Ann's hand?"

"No," says I. "She was holdin' Kenneth in her lap."

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